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# NALA AND DAMAYANTI

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# NALA & DAMAYANTI

BY

NORMAN MOSLEY PENZER, 1892–

ILLUSTRATED WITH TEN MINIATURES BY

P. ZENKER

LONDON

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# PREFACE

THE story of Nala and Damayanti is without doubt one of the most beautiful love stories in the world, yet, although it is known and loved throughout the length and breadth of India, it seems to be comparatively little known in Europe. Perhaps its definitely Indian character has tended to confine it to local environment, or perhaps it has not been presented in a sufficiently attractive English dress or been given the place of honour befitting its beauty and antiquity.

The few English translations which have appeared have usually been in "popular" collections of Indian tales. They have, moreover, been mere abstracts of the Sanskrit original.

In the present work the fault lies rather on the other side. The various versions of the tale as preserved in Sanskrit originals have been closely compared, the fullest and most correct order of incidents has been followed,



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and allowance has been made for the fact that even in the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, we have but a late version of the tale.

The result, therefore, is not a direct translation, still less is it an abridgement. It is an entirely original rendering of the tale based as closely as possible on the Sanskrit versions, but with additional descriptive matter connecting the numerous incidents. This new matter had been written in strict accordance with ancient Hindu literary tradition as far as metaphors and similes are concerned, and with due appreciation of Vedic rather than of Puranic conditions.

It is necessary to add some further details with regard to the history of the tale itself and the existing Sanskrit and vernacular versions.

Nala and Damayanti is of unknown date and authorship. Its author we shall never know, and its date can only be assigned to a particular period of Sanskrit literature by deducting from it any obvious additions of later date and drawing what inferences we can from the remaining text.

The oldest and most important version is without

doubt that found in the *Mahabharata*, which dates somewhere between the second centuries B.C. and A.D.

It is on this version that practically all subsequent Indian translations, adaptations, and abridgements have been made.

Of these perhaps one of the most important is that found in Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, a work of the eleventh century A.D., based on a much earlier and more lengthy work called the *Brihatkatha*. It will be found in vol. iv of my edition of *The Ocean of Story*. Here we notice certain differences from the version of the *Mahabharata* which assist in dating the work itself.

Somadeva was a Brahman of the Saivite persuasion, and naturally wanted to bring Shiva into the story if possible. He could not very well alter the names of the gods, because in the first place he always copied his texts faithfully, and in the second place he was dealing with a tale known throughout all India—a tale that had been told for centuries in every imaginable dialect, and a tale to which the *dramatis personæ* had long since been assigned by the unalterable law of ancient tradition.

Somadeva, therefore, contented himself with a single

reference to Puranic deities, and likens the love of Nala and Damayanti to that of Shiva and Parvati.

But what are these non-Puranic deities with which later adapters have refrained from interfering? They are Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama—all Vedic deities. This is the most important evidence for assigning the tale to Vedic days. Had it been Puranic, such deities as Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, Krishna, etc., would have been found instead.

But, apart from this, it is introduced into the *Mahabharata* in exactly the same way as are other similar Vedic tales, quite independent of the main plot, merely serving its purpose to illustrate some point or to draw some comparison.

As regards European translations and adaptations of the tale, I must refer readers to the bibliography I have already given on p. 292 of vol. iv of *The Ocean of Story*. In the text of the same volume will be found numerous notes, some of which appear at the end of the present work in a much reduced form.

In conclusion, I would acknowledge the great debt of obligation I am under to Mrs. Raymond-Cox, who

throughout the complete text has rendered me active assistance in the composition of the new descriptive matter mentioned above. The charm of the "miniatures" by P. Zenker needs but little mention on my part, as it is self-evident. Suffice it is to say that, although of the Persian school, they harmonise perfectly with the beauty and high moral tone of the story.

N. M. PENZER.

St. John's Wood.
*October* 1926.

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## CHAPTER I

THERE was once a young king named Nala who ruled in the city of Nishada. So strong was he and handsome, so exceedingly skilled in horsemanship, so fearless and resourceful, that even as Indra is chief of all the gods, so was he a veritable king of all kings. Indeed, so exalted was he in every way above all others, that he resembled the sun when in the fulness of its glory it shines from the zenith.

This noble king, the leader of a mighty army, including tens of thousands of horses, chariots, and elephants, was, like Manu himself, the first of bowmen. He was learned in the Vedas and most scrupulous in furthering the welfare of the Brahmans. He was brave beyond conception, honest and fair, yet withal fond of playing dice. Beloved by his people, both rich and poor, he was known to them as Protector, the upright judge of law, and by

them venerated for his great understanding and self-denial. Poets sang his glorious deeds, and his subjects worshipped him as an incarnation of some deity enthroned in the mysterious temples. Under Nala's rule misery and poverty were unknown, peace smiled on the land, and the wealth of the cities grew.

The king's brother, however, named Pushkara, through being the younger, had no immediate responsibility in the management of the state, so, in consequence of idleness, he had become dissolute and extravagant, spending most of his time in gambling and riotous living. Many hours of anxiety had he caused the king, for he was wayward, malicious, and careless of affairs entrusted to him. And although he was but a year younger than Nala, and had enjoyed the same advantages of instruction, the same experiences of travel which their famous father Virasena had bestowed alike on each, yet there was as much difference between them as between glass and a wishing-jewel.

The beauty of king Nala was so refulgent that a mere glance was sufficient to scorch the heart and inflame the soul of any woman, yet in spite of all the love he inspired

around him, he had remained unmarried. This was a source of great concern to his councillors, but of envious satisfaction to Pushkara, for, with no children born to Nala, he was the sole heir; and who could tell, when battling with some turbulent neighbour, what might happen to the king.

Now there also ruled at this time in the adjoining state of Vidarbha a king of fierce and gigantic mien named Bhima. He was, like Nala, a great warrior of terrible prowess, yet kind and virtuous, so that the meanest of his subjects loved him. But some years previously he had bitterly bemoaned his lot to the gods, for he was then childless. He had no son to succeed him, no one to do him honours at his death and sacrifice for the speedy journey of his soul towards the realms of the immortals. Great was his grief when he found that the measures for obtaining children which he had tried were all in vain. He resorted then to the austerities of the ascetics, endeavouring by meditation to influence the gods; and later on his prayers and penances were rewarded, for there came to him a certain Brahmarshi named Damana whom the king, being well versed in auguries, received

with the utmost respect, and likewise did the queen with humility and graciousness.

The illustrious Rishi Damana, being well pleased with his reception, granted them in the name of Indra their great wish to have children. Accordingly there was born to king Bhima and his consort a jewel of a daughter and three sons of lofty souls and great fame. The name of the daughter was Damayanti, and of the sons, Dama, Danta, and illustrious Damana. These three boys were endowed with every accomplishment and inherited their father's gigantic aspect and fierce prowess. But the slender-waisted Damayanti, for beauty and brightness, good name and grace, became celebrated all over the world, for as she grew from infancy to girlhood the beauty of her form increased beyond all mortal semblance. She was a creature fashioned by Kama, the God of Love himself, to show to mankind the quintessence of loveliness that lived eternally in the gardens of Nandana.

As the years went by king Bhima saw how his daughter's radiancy unfolded like the soft colours on the dawn-tinged Himalayan peaks, or the petals of the blue

lotus at the bidding of the sun; and marvelling greatly in his heart, he thanked in his thrice-daily prayers the high gods and that holy Rishi, by whom he had received such incomparable delight.

He appointed hundreds of hand-maidens of noble birth, apparelled in jewelled robes, as well as countless slaves, to wait upon Damayanti, who had now reached the age of twelve, as though she was Indra's wife, the queen of heaven herself. Yet his lotus-eyed daughter, the faultless-featured Damayanti, arrayed in her spotless raiment of white linen, purple-bordered and decked with garlands and ornaments of smaragd, gold, and beryl, shone amidst her brilliant court like the luminous lightning of the clouds. Indeed, the dark-eyed damsel was as fair to look upon as Ushas, the dawn-maiden who rides in the golden chariot of the twin Ashvins over the snow-mantles and fleecy cloud-banks that drape the mountain-tops. Such beauty of body was never seen or heard of before, either among celestials, Apsarases, or among men, and although they were somewhat envious, it filled the gods with gladness to gaze on her, and beholding with their all-seeing eyes that casket created by Kama to

preserve all the essence of loveliness, they agreed that there was not her peer throughout the three worlds.

Moreover Nala too, a tiger among men, was matchless in beauty. He was the embodiment of Kama himself when that young god, borne upon his emerald-winged parrot, rides the clear air of spring, showering his flower-tipped arrows from his bow of cane with a bowstring of black bees.

The fame of the tender, fragile beauty of Damayanti and the divine manly figure of king Nala travelled the length and breadth of the land, so that at the court of Nishada heralds and vagrant minstrels sang of the wonders of Damayanti, as they would of a goddess miraculously come to earth; while in the presence of king Bhima's daughter were recited long lays upon the exploits and virtues of Nala, until the deeds of Indra seemed forgotten.

Thus it was that, though they had never seen each other, there was sown in each heart, by the stirring imagery of the lays, an interest in, and attachment to the other. And that mysterious longing possessed them and grew stronger, until it directed all their

thoughts. They were like two streams springing from two far-sundered hills, but flowing towards the same sea, that widen and deepen, thrusting their growing strength through winding valleys and steep ravines, leaping precipitous falls, cleaving the virgin forest, until they merge all the hurry and fury of their courses into one majestic confluence; and then quietly and in the wide flow of peace, now intermingled, flow together to the eternal sea. Such was the destiny of those springs of love, rising from the heart of Nala and Damayanti. In the soul of Nala the dawn of love was the flash of day-break that rushed headlong to a blazing noon, beneath which he laboured day after day. It had no shadowy setting, and even at night, shining unquenchably, dispelled all sleep. The affairs of state grew irksome, he wearied of what had before been interesting. In hunting and chariot-racing he tried desperately to forget the turmoil of his soul. But it was of no avail. He grew melancholy and sought the solitude of the private gardens about the palace. In the sequestered peace of those gardens Nala wandered in the cool of early morning and evening. With heavy, despondent steps he walked

the green lawns, the cypress-dotted slopes, or lingered meditatively before a marble-rimmed pool in which darting gold and crimson fish scintillated near the surface.

As he lay in the beam-spotted shade of banyans and groves of orange trees, the air was heavy with scent of jasmine and giant roses. He would sit for hours chin upon hand within one of the cool granite kiosks that stood before the lotus lakes. A flight of green-winged parrots passed unnoticed by him like a cloud, and settled amidst the orange trees. He watched as in a dream the flouncings of a superb peacock, perched upon one of the carved stone elephants that formed the balustrade of the marble steps leading from terrace to terrace. The busy darting of ospreys and birds of paradise under the dense foliage of the banyan trees evoked a sigh of wistfulness for their unrestrained gaiety. The ostentation of a heron stalking at the margin of a drinking-pool roused no smile in him. He was more melancholy than the sleepy owl winking from the branch above him. Within Nala's heart was burning the fire of newly awakened love, and before a flame so unappeasable the world seemed dark and colourless. While through his mind one name

was singing: "Damayanti!" "Damayanti!" until he thought the humming of the myriads of busy wings of insects, pirouetting in clouds over the orchids and beds of blue lotuses, repeated it as they droned their incessant harmonies. His whole world was filled with one tremendous longing.

One day when he was wandering thus beneath the shadowed gloom of those solitary groves, playing absently with a white, tiger-spotted orchid that he had carelessly plucked, he heard a great whirring of wings above the trees and saw a shimmering flash like summer lightning. Looking beyond the wood, he noticed that a flight of magnificent swans had settled upon the rush-fringed margin of the lake. They were more beautiful than any he had seen before; their long and slender necks, as white as the snow on Kailasa, were tipped with coral-tinted beaks; their heads were blazoned with a diamond of black; their wings, rising like twin sails from the prow-shaped chest, had shining feathers of burnished gold. Nala was roused from the lethargy of depression by so wondrous a sight. He crept softly nearer, intending to capture one if he could. At last he stood waiting

behind a tree trunk, just near where one of the swans was now ambling with its peculiar swaying gait across a stretch of sward. He made a dash for it and caught it, tucking it swiftly under one arm and gripping the white throat with his other hand. The rest fled with hoarse cries and a roaring of wings like a hurricane; they were far away in a moment, necks outstretched and spear-like, their formation that of an arrow-head perfectly retained. Nala watched them recede, dark silhouettes on the pale light of the horizon until lost to sight; then, turning to examine the gorgeous bird in his arms, he was amazed to hear a human voice come from its throat saying: "O king, do not slay me, for I can ease thy misery. I will speak of thee to Damayanti in such a way that she will never look upon another."

The astonished Nala, hearing these words, released the swan, and behold, it rose on its wings and vanished in the sky like the flash of a meteor. That night he felt happier, and for the first time for many weeks slept soundly.

On the following morning those swans arrived at Kundina and alighted in the courts of the palace, where

Damayanti, surrounded by her hand-maidens, was walking towards the bathing pools. They all shouted with amazement and joy at the sight of such extraordinary golden plumage, and Damayanti, filled with delight, wished at once to capture one. Excitedly she told her maids to chase one swan apiece, so that the birds would not all escape when they rushed upon them. Then, holding her robe up above her knees, Damayanti eagerly led the chase. But those wonderful swans scattered in all directions as though exceedingly afraid, while the laughing, radiant damsels ran after them. In this way Damayanti was separated from the others and led on, panting but joyous, into a secluded part of the gardens, where at last she caught her swan. She was surprised to find the bird quite tame, for it nestled in her lap and pecked gently at her beautiful lips with its coral-tinted beak; but she almost fainted with astonishment when the golden-winged swan said to her, as it slid its white head against her ear: "O princess Damayanti, there is a king named Nala who has no peer among men; in beauty he equals the twin Ashvins or the god Kandarpa. O thou of slender waist, if thou becomest the wife of Nala, thy beauty and thy

life will not have been in vain. In our far wanderings we have not seen one to equal Nala's power, one could no more restrain his energy than imprison the ceaseless flow of the Ganges within a single jar. Thou art the flawless jewel of women just as Nala is the unalloyed gold of men, and such a union would be a gem of divine perfection worthy to be set in the forehead of Brahma."

The love that was in her heart made Damayanti pale, and her voice tremble as she replied: "Yes, I have longed to see him. O mysterious swan, wilt thou go now and speak to Nala in this same way?"

"I will," said the swan, and immediately vanished in the air, returning with incredible speed to Nishada, where it sought out king Nala, to relate all that the princess had said and looked; and the king was happy in the assurance of her love.

Meanwhile the hand-maidens had given up the chase, for each had found that just as she was about to seize the swan the bird flew up and vanished; so, tired and hot, they sought for Damayanti. They found the princess in a dense part of the little wood, looking very pale, as though something momentous had occurred. They sup-

ported her, rearranged her dishevelled garments, and escorted her back to the palace. Little did they know how painful was the wound the God of Love had made in her heart. After she heard the message of the swan the princess Damayanti knew no peace of mind. She would sit for hours with upturned gaze in moods of love-lorn abstraction, uttering sighs of longing and little exclamations of despair. Thin-handed melancholy stole her smiles, made hollow the sweet convexities of her cheeks. She would wander disconsolately as one entranced, weeping in solitude for her aching heart, which was now possessed by the inexorable Kama. Her rest was riven by the hosts of fantasy; her sleep disturbed by her cries of "Nala!" so that the ravages of fatigue left her but the ghost of her former self. Seeing Damayanti restless day and night, without enjoyment of any festival or amusement, unable to lie down or eat, looking like one walking in a dream, the hand-maids of the princess hinted to king Bhima, her father, that the unassuaged passions of the heart might cause his daughter irreparable harm.

Thereupon the king, alarmed at Damayanti's altered appearance and realising how serious was her illness,

that fever of unrequited love, reflected that now his daughter was of age and therefore could choose her own husband at the ceremony of the *Svayamvara*.

Accordingly he sent forth the proclamation, carried by heralds and Brahmans to all the kings and princes of the earth, saying : " Know, all ye heroes, that Damayanti's *Svayamvara* is at hand."

As to a command of Indra, the response to this proclamation was eager and immediate. Kings and princes from all quarters of the continent vied with each other in the magnificence of their retinue, pushing forward in feverish haste the multifarious preparations for the long journey to king Bhima's court, so that in a very short time all the roads and mountain-passes, forest-tracks and waterways were congested by the long trains of royal travellers which flowed ceaselessly towards the city of Kundina, just as the five rivers with their thousands of tributaries, winding through many provinces, flow into the sea. The whole country-side was in a torment of excitement as, with a flickering of innumerable weapons, column after column went by to a thunderous rumbling of chariot wheels and the sound of royal fanfares. Some

of the princes rode in mighty wheeled chariots drawn by six towering horses, others in colonnaded *howdahs*, high on the backs of elephants elaborately caparisoned in red and green robes, with necklaces of bells and head ornaments of gold embroidery to fringe their huge foreheads; others again were carried in carved palanquins embossed with gold and inlaid with gems in the forms of flowers.

Behind these marched richly armed and accoutred companies of warriors, gaily garlanded, bearing bright pennons upon their spears and silken banners. The continual solemn tramp of elephants and camels, horses and men, was a pulse-beat throbbing throughout the land for weeks, while the hills and valleys re-echoed to the trumpeting of elephants and the sounding of drums. All the warrior princes of the earth were now in the livery of peace, hastening towards Kundina to be suitors for the hand of Damayanti; wars had been abandoned and campaigns postponed, so that for a time there was universal peace; and the gods in their celestial mansions were amazed.

About this time the most famous and holy Rishis,

Narada and Parvata, reached in the course of their wanderings the realms of Indra. When they saw the topless towers of the heavenly palace cleaving the infinite before them, they worshipped reverently until the guardians of the gate, having inquired as to their peace of mind and welfare, threw open the doors, like the rolling apart of twin mountains, and bade them enter in. The holy Rishis were received with great respect, and upon the lord of the gods asking about their well-being, Narada replied: "O divine Indra, peace attendeth us completely. And O Maghavan, peace attendeth all the kings of the earth." Hearing these words of Narada, the great slayer of Vala and Vritra, knowing that the kings of the earth deem it an honour to die in battle, could not understand this wide-spread peace. Looking perplexed, he said: "But to those rulers of the earth who renounce desire of life in battle and meet death at the spear-point without flying from the field, this heavenly realm everlastingly belongs, and will grant them all desires even as it does to me. Where are these royal heroes now?"

Then Narada replied: "Why thou seest not the kings of the earth, O mighty Indra, is because the daughter

of king Bhima, whose beauty transcendeth all, hath conquered them. Damayanti is her name, and her *Svayamvara*, O Maghavan, occurreth soon. Thither all the kings and princes of the world are going, travelling from all directions with a noise like eternal thunder and with splendour of colour like the pageantry of a perpetual dawn. Each one of those lords of earth desireth to possess that pearl among women, most eagerly, O Indra."

Whilst the wise Rishi was saying this, the rest of the Lokapalas, with Agni amongst them, approached the lord of the gods. They all heard the momentous news which Narada brought, and immediately became excited, exclaiming one and all amongst them: "We shall go too." Thereupon they ran to their chariots and, accompanied by hosts of Gandharvas, set out for the country of Vidarbha, led by the rumbling thunder of Indra's car, which was driven by the grim-visaged, iron-wristed Matali. High through the heavens they rode, their cavalcade rushing by like a hail of fiery meteors.

Meanwhile king Nala, hearing of the tremendous concourse of kings that was assembling, set out early and with a cheerful heart, his countenance, made radiant

by the light of his love for Damayanti, shining with incredible beauty.

And it so happened that the cloud-hidden golden chariots of the gods carried them across the dusty road-winding trail of Nala, and, looking down, they saw the young king striding the earth, more vigorously beautiful than the God of Love himself. Beholding that resplendent form more dazzling than the sun, they were filled with astonishment and dismay, and most of them abandoned the journey in despair. But the four chief gods, Indra, Agni, Yama, and Varuna, fully knowing their own powers, left their cloud-borne chariots in the sky and descended from the welkin into the presence of the amazed Nala. The dwellers of heaven addressed the king thus: "Thou mighty king of Nishada, O truth-loving Nala, be our messenger, we pray thee." With hands folded reverentially Nala replied: "O mysterious ones, I obey!" Then, approaching them, he said: "Who are ye? Whose messenger shall I be? What shall I do for ye?"

The lord of the gods answered: "I am Indra, this is Agni, the maker of fire, this Varuna, the lord of

waters, and this, O king, is even Yama, the destroyer of men's bodies. We are immortals come hither for Damayanti's sake. We command thee to hasten to Damayanti and tell her that the four guardians of the world are coming to her *Svayamvara* to seek her hand. Tell her she must choose one of us for her lord."

A cold fear swept over Nala, and his face paled as rapidly as the sky loses its crimson at the sudden fall of night. He remained silent, not knowing what to say, until the full import of that command was borne upon him. Then he turned to Indra with hands suppliant and eyes entreating, and said: "Mighty Indra, do not send me with such a message. I cannot take it, for I am journeying to Kundina for that selfsame purpose. How can a man himself in love speak to his beloved on behalf of others? O thou immortal lord of the gods, spare me that. I beseech thee, spare me that."

But the stern-faced Indra coldly replied: "King of the Nishadas, thou hast already promised. Thou saidst, 'I will,' how canst thou therefore not obey?" Nala, torn between his allegiance to the gods and the love in his heart for Damayanti, thought for a while, then said:

"On the turrets of Kundina thousands of men keep watch and all the gateways to the palace are heavily guarded. How can I hope to enter there unobserved?"

"We shall endow thee with divine movements," said Indra, with a gesture of authority; "thou shalt enter invisibly." Greatly dejected, and knowing that it was useless to resist the commands of the gods, Nala answered: "I will go."

Immediately, in less time than the pause between one pulse-beat and the next, the king found himself within the cool quietude of a palace court, under the shade of palms, beside beds of flowers and running water. Looking around in amazement, he saw colonnades and curtained arches extending along the high white walls. Marble steps led up from the bird-sounding garden, and as Nala ascended them he heard, issuing from one of the gaily curtained arches, a beautiful voice, singing to the accompaniment of the lute. He went towards that sweet fount of melody and, drawing aside the silken hangings of the doorway, looked into the chamber, resting one arm upon the carved pilaster. He almost swooned with the beauty that filled his sight; he thought that he was gazing into

a resting-room of the celestial palace of Kailasa upon a group of heavenly nymphs at languorous ease. Eight lion-headed pillars supported a dome of marvellous mosaic depicting in multitudes of colours the rising of the queen of the Nagas from the dark regions of Patala. At the apex was wrought the picture of Garuda, the king of the birds, who was the deadly enemy of the Nagas, supporting from his beak a swinging lamp of bronze. Under the dome was a canopy of brocade hanging upon pillars of red-gold, patterned with figures of birds whose feet were shaped from emeralds. It was spread above a jetting fountain of ivory and ebony plated with polished silver, by the side of which stood a couch set with pearls and edged with alternate rubies and green malachite. Reclining upon the couch amidst the rich curves of many cushions was a damsel as radiant as the white lotus lying upon its many-petalled, dark-green pericarp. No eyes had seen a fairer one. Her silken robe was of softest weave as of white moonlight or the hue of the jasmine flower, bound at the borders with emeralds as green as the young bamboo. Her breasts were clasped in a corselet of deepest blue made from

strings of uncut sapphires as large as betel-nuts. In a far corner dark-featured musicians strummed upon strange instruments, while a sweet voice, like the purling of a tiny stream, was singing. It was the wondrous Damayanti singing a love-song to herself as she rested, surrounded by fair hand-maidens, from the heat of the day. As she swayed gently to the rhythm of her song the girdle of coloured pearls about her lithe waist, rippling in the light, showed like a strand of the rainbow.

And Nala, enthralled by the splendour as in a trance, stepped through the archway, even as a moth enters a room attracted by the bright flame of a candle, regardless and dimly knowing that it means death and destruction. The song expired on Damayanti's lips, which were left shaped as though about to say the word "love." Her eyes were wide open, shining, fixed upon Nala, and his blazingly fixed upon her, and for a moment thus they remained, their eyes held motionless by the leash of gazing. The hand-maids sprang up wondering, each losing her heart to him at sight. Was he a god, or some noble Gandharva?

Damayanti was so overcome with bashfulness by the

appearance of such divine manliness that for a while she was quite unable to speak. But presently she smiled and by gesture permitted him to come nearer to her. With an answering smile Nala approached, his vision becoming more and more dazzled by her loveliness as he drew nearer. She looked like a wave of the sea of beauty tossed up by the breeze of youth. Her dark eyes, like deep pools imprisoned by the white peaks of Himalaya, shone as she smiled, just as those pools glisten under the beam of the moon, and her teeth showed as white as two strands of camomile petals newly strung.

If before, merely thinking of Damayanti had the power to bewilder Nala's mind, now the all-transcending vision of her deprived him of his reason and his speech. But the smiling Damayanti, no less amazed, at last spoke to him: "Who art thou, O hero of faultless features, who awakeneth all my love? O warrior of celestial form, tell me who thou art and why thou hast come hither? How couldst thou pass the guards and enter my apartments unobserved? Who art thou before whom obstacles melt away like snow before the sun?"

"O beauteous lady," he replied, "my name is Nala,

and I come here as a messenger of the gods. But the fame of thy beauty has been a ladder by which I have ascended step by step into thy presence. I come to tell thee that the celestials, Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama, have heard of thy matchless loveliness, and of thy *Svayamvara* about to be held, and that those mighty gods desire thee. It is through their power that I have entered unobserved. O beautiful lady, choose one of them for thy lord. Give me thy answer and let me go, for Kama's darts have pierced my heart, and there is no agony like the torture of forbidden love."

Damayanti bowed respectfully as the names of the gods were mentioned and remained silent for a moment. Then she looked up, a gentle smile moving over her face, like a silvery ripple on a lotus-pool, and said : " Love me, O my prince, with all thy heart. Only command me what I shall do for thee and it shall be done. O exalted one, give me faithfully thy love. The word of the swans is burning me. I am thine for ever. For thy sake, O Nala, have I called the kings of the earth to meet, so that I could choose thee. See thyself reflected in these eyes, so is thy image within my heart. Oh, do

not renounce one who adoreth thee—rather would I die than lose thee."

Nala was almost overcome and persuaded from his mission by that entreaty, but, torn though he was between duty and love, he answered: "Wilt thou choose a mortal for thy lord, when gods rival each other for thy love? Give thy heart to those divine lords, the creators of worlds, for I am less than the dust beneath their feet. Death comes to those mortals who displease the gods. Therefore save me, O Damayanti, choose thou a spouse from the celestial ones; for by accepting a god thou shalt enjoy spotless raiment, unfading garlands of variegated hues and wondrous ornaments. What woman would not marry lord Indra, whose terrible mace induceth all creatures to tread the path of virtue? What woman would not desire high-souled Varuna? Or if thy heart can choose the fierce Agni, then do so unhesitatingly. I pray thee, accept my friendly advice."

As Nala spoke these words a shadow passed over Damayanti's face and great tears welled up in her lustrous eyes; her long eyebrows were arched in an agony of grief. Sobs like the gusts of the hurricane

shook her slender form, making her pleading words more piteous: "O thou earthly king, by all the gods I worship, I choose thee for my lord. Thus have I vowed." And Damayanti stood with folded hands beseechingly before him. But the king, remembering that he was a messenger of the gods, replied to the trembling princess: "Dearest lady, would that I could take the leaves of the wishing-tree and make a screen of foliage around us, to shut out the world and be alone in thy presence. Do not regret my proffered love; though the sugar thereof has been pounded into a hundred fragments, still its powder is sweet. But having come hither on the mission of another, dare I seek my own interest? Yet, if there be a way that is honourable I will take it, and do thou likewise, O beauteous one."

Then the luminous-eyed Damayanti spoke slowly to king Nala, her voice throbbing with tears: "O lord of men, I see a blameless way whereby thou dost commit no sin, nor betrayest thy trust. Thou must come to my *Svayamvara* with Indra and the other gods. Then, O king, in the presence of all the Lokapalas, I will choose thee, and so no blame will fall on thee."

Nala's heart was flaming now with hope renewed, and all his soul was longing for the nectar of those lips that so beautifully shaped the words of immeasurable love. With a sigh and one last look he turned to go, and as he seemed to pass through the curtained archway by which he had entered, he was by magic of the gods transported far from the palace of Kundina into their celestial presence once more.

The great Lokapalas eagerly plied him with questions: had he seen the wondrous smiles of Damayanti? what message had she sent to them? "Tell us everything, O sinless monarch," they said.

Thereupon Nala related how he had reached Kundina and entered the portals of the palace unobserved by the veteran warders, armed with spears; how the hand-maidens and the princess were filled with wonder at his appearance in the royal chamber. "When I spoke to her of ye," Nala said, "the fair princess thought only of me and bade me bring this answer to ye, 'Let the gods come with thee to my *Svayamvara*. In their presence I will choose thee, and thus no blame will be thine.' And that, O mighty ones, is all that took

place. What will come to pass is in thy power, O lord of the gods."

The mighty four then bowed their heads and were silent, for they were aware of the truth of Nala's speech, and in their hearts knew that they were doomed to everlasting regret, having lost what was within their reach. They mounted their heavenly cars pensively, and in dismay returned to their celestial realms, arched high above the earth.

## CHAPTER II

IT was the eve of the day appointed for the *Svayamvara* to which king Bhima had summoned all the kings and princes of the land. All night long, by the light of torches and glimmering lamps, went on the hurried toil and hammering of the workmen putting the last touches to the terraces and pavilions of the arena. A luminous crescent moon rode the sky, breaking faint shadows from the frowning crenelles and solid bastions of the walls, around which clustered the many encampments of the guests with their numerous retinues. Within the city companies of naked slaves were cleansing the streets and strewing fresh earth on the bridle-paths. At a gigantic loom in an antechamber of the palace a feverish group of men were working the last strands of the ceremonial robes for the sacred elephants. There was an unwonted activity in Kundina this night,

an impression that every soul was sleeping restlessly, excited by the expectations of the morrow. Also the nocturnal creatures were excited: the owls screeched anxiously, diving from roof to roof; the vampire-bats whisked agitatedly to and fro, filling the air with soft rustlings, while even the peacocks in the palace gardens were disturbed and added their melancholy plaint to the midnight murmurings.

Down the road to the northern gate a belated cavalcade was moving with a rumble of chariot wheels sounding above the chiming elephant bells; the last prince from some distant realm was arriving. The mists that had condensed as the night went on rolled now over the river, flowing beside the western walls, and resembled great masses of bluish-tinted wool; they floated over the city too, veiling it from the white light of the moon, save where the piled pyramids of the temple, and the square walls supporting the domes and cupolas of the royal palace, soared above the slow-moving banks of bluish-white. Here and there also black fans and feathers, that were the tufted tops of palms, showed spectre-like above the mist; and under the white glare of the

moon the towers and roofs and trees seemed part of an unsubstantial mirage, an unearthly city suspended in the air.

Now it would soon be dawn; the eastern horizon was brushed with a thin delicate tinge of beryl, a transparent greenish light that spread over the sky like a dissolving emerald. The moon had set and a large planet in the west burned low. The horizon became a pale limpid green, contrasting strongly with the ashen whiteness overhead. Soon great pointed tongues of flame shot up, searching farther and farther over the ashen zenith, dyeing a few clouds to coral pink, restoring the day-time verdure to the forests and gradually melting the bluish mists about the city towers.

Dawn had come, the appointed day was here. The huge disc of the sun hurled itself into the sky and began its diurnal run. Flocks of crows rose cawing from the copses in the royal parks, and a host of parrots rose from the nesting trees, as though all the leaves had suddenly been blown from the branches. Then almost at once, without any warning, without even the soft gradations of twilight, the full blaze of day-time swept down on the city.

Far-famed was Kundina for its wonderful beauty in the morning, when by some trick of reflection the granite walls and edifices took on a rich rose-colour. It had been planned by a mighty ancestor of king Bhima whose mind had seen the rich properties of the stone. So he had conceived a rose-coloured city in which all the palaces, towers, houses, ramparts, balconies and temples were of one colour, one texture, and for decoration had them evenly diapered with posies of white flowers. One might have thought that all the walls were hung with white muslin of floral design, or that the whole town had been hewn out of pink onyx. The streets were laid out in straight lines flanked by groves of deodars or palms; they were wide enough for five chariots to drive abreast, and converged to a great open space in the centre of the city where stood the palace and the temples of the Brahmans. The pyramids of the great temple rose in profusion tier above tier, their many surfaces carved riotously into groups of gods, frescoes of prancing horses and statues of elephants. The long façade of the king's palace was rose-coloured also, and overlaid by garlands of lotuses, tulips and immortelles worked in mosaic of

porphyry and topaz; it overtopped the city, rising by endless repetition of kiosks one above the other, each like the one below, with the same colonnades, fretted marble, remarkable domes; all soft rose to the topmost pinnacles, where coloured bannerets were already unfurled to the morning breeze.

The city was awake at an early hour, everyone joyously eager for the festivities of the day, for not only was the princess of Kundina to choose for herself a husband, but the bazaars and streets would be crowded with wealthy strangers; there would be processions of magnificent cars and palanquins.

Within the palace preparations went on apace; the units of the royal procession to the arena of the *Svayamvara* were assembled in the courtyards. Damayanti, assisted by her hand-maids, was bathing in the grotto where was a pool hollowed out from the red rock, surrounded by arching walls, encrusted with mosaic of small mirrors. Her hand-maids braided her hair and anointed her fair body with musk and powdered saffron, then later in her private chamber adjusted the jewels to her ears and hair, and put on her necklaces and an embroidered robe.

In the camp of the princely suitors, wagoners and charioteers were preparing the gorgeous cars in which their lords would drive to the arena; mahouts were laying the ornaments upon the brows of stately elephants; tall slaves were polishing the silver of carved palanquins. Trumpet calls sounded over the plain; armed men glittered upon the battlements of the city wall, every turret and pinnacle of which was now decked with waving gonfalons.

Down the wide avenues between the rose-tinted houses drifted the animated crowds of the populace, the innumerable variety of their clothes making a dazzling, ever-changing pattern, studded with sudden sparkling jewels, as they hurried towards the great amphitheatre, where, after the ceremony of *Svayamvara*, there would be chariot races and boxing tournaments.

Outside the western gate was the camp of Nala, who was now, accompanied by Varshneya, his charioteer, making the final disposition for the festival. He was somewhat uneasy in mind, wondering what the gods would do. But he determined, nevertheless, to be the most distinguished and magnificent in the parade of

suitors, and so superintended the grooming of his three black horses that would draw his mighty car, the rumbling wheels of which were like Indra's thunder re-echoing amongst Himalayan peaks.

The sun was higher over Kundina now; the intenser blaze had dimmed the soft rose colour of the city to a delicate pink, which formed a background for the green patches of trees or the sward of the parks and gardens, for the variegated colours which were gay cloths hung from fretted windows. The brazen plaques and the silver locks upon the towering gates threw down the sun in pools of reflected light, red like warm blood or white like cascades of running water.

Presently the auspicious hour of the morning came; the watchers on the clock tower in the temple square sent signals to the four quarters of the city. Immediately there was a rumble of drums and a ringing fanfare of bugles from the ramparts above the many gates, as with flashing hinges and creaking bolts the huge bronze doors were rolled aside. The calls of the Vidarbha trumpeters were answered by the trumpeters of the royal visitors as the processions began to move. From all the roads

through the many gates of Kundina flowed the winding trains of the princes, like so many iridescent streams into one rose-tinted lake. The tramping of thousands of elephants was as tumultuous as the ocean, the swaying of their huge backs was like the swells of the mighty deep. Behind these animals that headed the processions from the several gates, came golden chariots driven three abreast, each with three magnificent horses, gaily caparisoned, that nodded and curveted to the torrential cheering of the crowds. Then came musicians playing solemn melodies upon conches and copper horns, followed by naked slaves marching rhythmically beneath the burden of litters that were like heavenly pavilions in miniature; then bodies of bowmen, of mailed spearmen, of richly ornamented horsemen; and then, riding either in a gilded *howdah* upon a jet-black elephant or in a chariot of marvellous workmanship drawn by six white horses, came the princes who were eager to obtain the hand of the beautiful Damayanti; some even were borne in litters, others rode proudly upon horseback. All of them were resplendent in most glorious robes, so that both young and old appeared magnificent. Behind the

personal servants of each prince followed a long train of camels, oxen, and asses, laden with chests and bales, caskets and urns, in which were the costly presents for the young princess.

Soon they were passing through the hundred gateways of the amphitheatre, which was situated at the lower reaches of the royal park. It was a mighty structure of soaring arches which supported the terraces for the people, surrounding an arena of white sand. The lofty portals were flanked by graceful masts from which fluttered standards of many colours, and golden pillars garlanded with the lotus, poppy and yellow jasmine. A roll of drums and a blast of trumpets greeted the arrival of each prince at the scene of the *Svayamvara*; as they entered by the various gates they were conducted with all their trains by young archers, mounted upon champing steeds, to the places appointed for them around the vast enclosure; and they looked in their pride and majesty like mighty lions entering the mountain wilds. Those lords of earth, decked with fragrant garlands, polished ear-rings and jewelled necklaces, descended from their various conveyances and took their allotted seats. They

resembled in that sacred assembly the region Bhogavati that swarms with Nagas of incomparable beauty, or a mountain cavern filled with striped tigers of majestic mien. They sat upon thrones beneath silken umbrellas; behind them stood their bodyguard, bearing scimitars and shields that shone in the sun like a countless host of stars. Their strong arms covered with rare bracelets resembled iron maces ribbed with jewels, yet were so graceful, with hands so well shaped, that they looked like five-headed snakes. Their beautiful features amidst fair locks shone like suns in the firmament. As in a gold crescent set with gems, that binds the hair of a queen, some of the stones sparkle more brilliantly than others, so amidst this semicircle of great princes some blazed forth more radiantly. Soon they were all seated, and the vast wealth of presents had been piled about the raised daïs in the centre of the plain.

There was a sound of timbrels and drums; the excitement of the people about the palace gates denoted the approach of the royal procession. Guards took up positions by the daïs and trumpeters signalled brazenly from the main entrance to the arena. Two black elephants

draped in brocaded damask appeared; upon them were bowmen in gorgeous uniforms; following behind were musicians playing reverently, marching slowly, and coloured chariots bearing the three brothers of Damayanti, who drove fine restless horses that tossed their plumes and trappings in the air. Then six grey elephants in crimson robes whose foreheads, trunks and ears were covered with intricate designs traced with cinnabar and other pigments. Within the glittering *howdahs* stood young warriors, adorned like gods, graceful and handsome; they were wearing tall tiaras upon their heads and as they passed threw perfume and coloured powders over the people beneath them, scattering clouds of yellow, green, violet and orange, that, settling on the elephants, tinged them with fantastic tones. Next were the tame cheetahs of the king, walking stealthily, carefully, beside the slaves who led them by chains, holding for greater security to their ringed tails; their jade-green eyes gazed mysteriously upon the excited crowd.

More musicians and clattering cavalry passed, then king Bhima, mounted on a milk-white horse, appeared, and the heralds saluted with a ringing blast of trumpets.

Behind him came swaying into view the graceful pillared palanquin in which rode the beautiful princess Damayanti ; the white muslin curtains were drawn. Another litter, in which the queen was hidden, followed, and with it the body of hand-maidens that attended on Damayanti. They swept into the beflagged and flower-decked arena ; the dust from the chariot wheels blew away in clouds. The king alighted and ascended the daïs, followed by his queen, but the litter in which Damayanti was hidden unseen, but seeing all, was carried on to it and set down before the eager eyes of the princes. There was a hush of expectation. The music stopped. Then the king drew aside the curtains of the jewelled palanquin with a flourish, and the radiant pearl among women, the faultless-featured Damayanti, shone before all. Such was the perfection of her form that wherever the glances of those illustrious kings first fell, there were they riveted, dazzled by her immortal splendour and unable to look away.

She reclined as straight and slender as a lily-stalk upon soft cushions of Zaituni satin, clothed in a robe of shimmering silver, that was purfled with all manner of

embroideries. Around her neck hung a fine old circlet of rubies, and chains of great pearls, hollowed out and filled with odoriferous musk. Her sweet face so suddenly revealed was like the lotus that unfolds at the first flush of morning light, when Ushas, the dawn-maiden, flings open the doors of the sky. The assembled kings and princes saluted her, each one as in a dream; though expecting unparalleled beauty they were astonished at such celestial glory. And each heart, filled with desire, bore the sweeter fruit of anticipated fulfilment.

The deep-throated heralds then began the long recital of the suitors, their names and those of their countries, the deeds of fame which had won them renown, ending with a summary of the presents each had brought to lay at the feet of that peerless damsel. But all the time Damayanti was searching the long line of faces for the smile of Nala, who, she knew, was there. And her heart sank within her when she saw at the right end of the semi-circle five princes all resembling Nala, and she could not be certain which one was her beloved. She looked at them again and again: surely that was he? No, for those on either side were exactly alike. Beholding them

seated there she thought each in turn was the king of Nishada, for there was no difference of form or feature. Doubt and uncertainty possessed her; realising suddenly that the four gods were present, competing as mortals for her hand, she grew pale and anxious, wondering what she should do and how she would distinguish the celestials from her royal Nala.

In great despair she tried to recollect the attributes and outward signs of gods, which wise men had taught her, but found that they did not apply to the deities before her in mortal disguise. While the sonorous droning of the heralds went on declaiming the long list of suitors, of names and histories, Damayanti thought earnestly about it, until at last, unable to find a solution, she decided to seek the protection of the gods themselves and appeal to their mercy. Intensely concentrating upon that one thought, she bowed down to the gods in mind, and with folded hands, as if supplicating, said softly: "Since I heard the voice of the golden swans I have chosen the king of Nishada for my lord. Therefore, O immortal ones, reveal him to me. I have never swerved from him in thought or word, therefore, for the sake

of that truth, O gods, reveal him to me. Gods themselves have destined Nala to be my lord, O then for the sake of that truth reveal him to me. It is for love of Nala that I have taken this vow, and for the sake of that truth reveal him to me. O exalted guardians of the world, assume your proper forms so that I may know my rightful king."

The gods sitting amongst the princes heard those pleading words and were moved by her faith and fervent love, realising the sweet affection and unchanging devotion she felt for Nala. And since whatever is asked of the gods in faith they cannot willingly withhold, so they resumed their celestial attributes, retaining, however, the mortal semblance they had chosen.

Thereupon Damayanti was able to distinguish the celestials from the throng of princes, for whereas all others had hot perspiring faces, eyes that faltered in the glare of the sun, and their garlands were already fading and were dust-stained since the procession, the four gods sat cool and dry, with unwinking eyes, unfading wreaths, their bodies unstained with dust, nor did their feet touch the earth, and they cast no shadow before them. In the

middle of them stood Nala, revealed by his shadow and winksome eyes, his dusty and moistened skin.

Then the colour returned to the princess's cheeks; she became aware once more of the herald's deep voice, who, having finished the long list of names, was announcing to the vast arena that the royal daughter of king Bhima would now of her own free will choose for herself a husband.

The stately palanquin was taken up; the princess was carried along the line of kings and princes, each one bowing as she passed, in homage and resignation, for by that each knew he was not the chosen one. At length she reached the throne of Nala; with a smile like a breaking lotus-bud, with blushes and drooping eyelids, she caught the hem of his robe and kissed it; then placed around his neck the graceful garland that betokened the making of her choice. A mighty shout went up from the assembled company: "The princess has chosen Nala, king of Nishada." The kings broke out into exclamations of dismay or disappointment, while the gods applauded the happy prince, saying: "Mercy is by far the worthiest of jewels that grace the wise, and sweetest

fruit culled by man is ready forgiveness; receive ours, for thou hast won the princess fairly."

The royal son of Virasena comforted the beauteous Damayanti with these words: "Since thou hast chosen a mortal in the presence of gods, know me for a husband ever obedient to thy command, and as long as life continueth in this body of mine, I will remain thine and thine alone."

Then, in accordance with the ceremonies, Nala followed the procession on to the platform, whence the vast populace could see them and cheer their welcome. Choirs of the Brahmans sang hymns and incantations, intoned blessings upon them, and the king wedded them according to the most ancient rites. The happy pair, beholding Indra and the other gods, by silent prayer sought their protection. After the marriage ceremonies had been performed, the Lokapalas, well pleased in their hearts, bestowed eight gifts upon Nala. Indra, the lord of Shachi, gave him the power to behold his godhead in sacrifices and to attain the blessed regions hereafter. Agni bestowed the power to summon him whenever he wished, and in the hereafter, realms as bright as himself. Yama granted

him subtle taste in food and pre-eminence in all virtue. Varuna, lord of waters, also gave him power to summon his presence whenever he desired, and in addition unfading garlands of celestial fragrance.

Thus, having bestowed these marvellous gifts, the gods returned in a flash of light to the blue vault of heaven, and, mounting once more their sky-going chariots, rode back towards Kailasa. Meanwhile, the bridal procession returned amidst the sound of merry music and laughing crowds to the palace, and king Bhima gave orders for the celebrations to commence. The people gave themselves up to the sport of the arena; there were chariot races, spear throwing, and fights between wild elephants and between a tiger and an elephant. At the palace in the cool of the evening, after all had bathed and put on new garments, the princely guests assembled for the great banquet spread under the soaring aisles of the grand hall. Costly dishes were served; huge goblets of Soma were quaffed to the last drop; musicians played, while jugglers and *bayadères* performed on the crystal floor which reflected their rapid-moving toes and swaying bodies. Story-tellers contributed their finest tales, while

mimes made the merry company shout with glee. Thus the revelling went on far into the night: the smoking, guttering torches cast fantastic shadows from the vast throng of banqueters on the walls, to mingle there with the intricate paintings that adorned them.

On the following morning king Bhima performed many sacrifices and gave thanksgivings to the gods for the happy union of his daughter. After many tender farewells and fervent blessings, Nala, having attained that peerless princess Damayanti, set out for his own country.

Meanwhile the blazing guardians of the worlds who were returning to Kailasa met on their way Dvapara and Kali, travelling at a great pace in the opposite direction. Seeing them, the slayer of Vala and Vritra said: "O Kali, whither goest thou with Dvapara?" "We are going to Damayanti's *Svayamvara*," he replied, "to obtain her hand in marriage, for my heart is upon the damsel."

Hearing this Indra smiled. "That *Svayamvara* is already ended," said he, "before our own eyes she hath chosen king Nala as her husband."

At that Kali, the evil spirit of gambling, the vilest

of the celestials, was overcome with wrath and exclaimed in an angry voice: "Since she hath in the presence of celestials chosen a mortal for her lord, she shall be cursed through him ever more."

But Indra answered at once: "With our approval hath Damayanti chosen Nala. He is well versed in all religious duties, conducts himself rightly and hath studied the four Vedas. He is faithful to his vows and sacrifices regularly to the gods. In that king of men, like to a Lokapala, are truth, forbearance, knowledge and perfect tranquillity of soul. O Kali, the fool that curses Nala, crowned with such virtues, curses himself, destroys himself, and sinks into the wide bottomless pit of the lowest hell, rife with torments."

And Kali, pale, with ill-concealed anger, replied sullenly: "O Indra, thou art not able to restrain the elephant of my intention with the elephant-hook of knowledge. I shall possess Damayanti nevertheless." But the gods smiled and passed on into heaven. Kali, still enraged, turned to Dvapara, when the gods had disappeared, and said: "I swear I shall possess Nala's queen, deprive him of his kingdom, so that he shall no

more enjoy the beauty of Bhima's daughter. Thou must help me, O Dvapara, by entering the dice, so that when Nala plays, it shall always fall unfavourable to him. I shall wait the opportunity to enter Nala's body and thus possessing his soul force him to play; then by thy help within the dice the lord of Nishada shall lose all."

So, having made this compact with Dvapara, the evil Kali descended to where the long line of Nala's company was travelling slowly towards his kingdom, and invisible to all followed him thither.

In due course, after many days' journey, the victorious king arrived at his city of Nishada. Near the eastern gate he was met in full state by his brother Pushkara, who paid homage to the queen, losing his heart, on their first meeting, to her ravishing beauty. Great rejoicings were held in the city; king Nala performed rites and sacrifices in honour of his safe and glorious return. He gave magnificent gifts to the holy Brahmans who sang the praises of the young queen. He ruled like a god, radiant and justly, so that his subjects marvelled. The sun of happiness shone in his face and the vigour of success ennobled him; he sported with fair Damayanti

in delightful woods and groves, and they bathed together in enchanting pools, situated amidst the rich pleasaunces of the palace gardens.

And in time Damayanti bore him a son named Indrasen and a daughter named Indrasena, so that Nala was wealthy and blessed beyond the dreams of men.

## CHAPTER III

TWELVE years passed by, during which Nala and his beautiful queen lived together in great happiness and prosperity. He was honoured and loved by every one of his loyal subjects: the glamour of his fame spread far and wide, as resplendent as the newly risen sun, while the glory of his kingdom extended over the vessel of the universe.

Twelve years the vengeful Kali dwelt in the country of the Nishadas, waiting his opportunity to bring ruin upon Nala. This he could only do by entering the very soul of the king, but so virtuous was Nala that during all these years he had been unable to gain an entrance. One day, however, the noble Nala befouled his feet when walking in the royal park, and on returning knelt to his twilight prayers, neglecting in his fatigue to wash his feet. As he thus knelt on the floor of the god's shrine, which was made of a pavement of crystal and emerald in such

a way as to resemble water full of branching stems of aquatic plants, Kali, ever on the watch, seized that fatal moment and entered into the body of the king, taking possession of his soul. Having triumphed at last he hurried away through the night to appear before Pushkara, the king's brother, and in a whisper urged him to challenge Nala at dice, promising that great riches and the kingdom of the Nishada should be his. Eager to gain possession of the kingdom and to occupy his brother's throne, the jealous Pushkara consented.

In the morning, when he had performed the duties incumbent on him at the beginning of the day, Pushkara went to the palace and was received by Nala in the assembly pavilion, where he had just finished giving audience to his courtiers. Pushkara, biding his time, then challenged the king to a game of dice. Nala at first refused, but after repeated requests, and ashamed to refuse any challenge in the presence of Damayanti, finally agreed, and accordingly fixed the time for the game. Meanwhile, in order to make certain of Nala's ruin, Dvapara, Kali's friend, took upon himself the shape of the chief dice, " the bull," and thus success was ensured to Pushkara. When the

two sat down to the fatal game, Nala, by the power of Kali, began to lose. Even from the first, whatever the king staked passed into the possession of his brother—heaped coins of gold and silver, bars of gold, finely wrought vessels of wondrous shapes and handfuls of precious jewels. As the game proceeded, Nala, now completely under Kali's influence, staked more and more. "My luck will turn," he said, not knowing that his luck would be of no avail against such powerful odds.

His money gone, the king would not stop the game: he sent for his highly ornamented robes, his heavily jewelled gowns, his necklaces and ropes of pearls, and chains of office, on three of which hung talismans against misfortune; and before the day had ended all were gone. Yet he could not stop: maddened beyond measure by continual losing, Nala went on staking higher and higher; his chariots with the fleetest teams, his horses and their gorgeous trappings now became the prize and all were duly lost, and with the dawn of the next day still the fatal game went on. Not listening to the dissuasions of his friends who stood around him, Nala's

weapons, elephants and then his army all fell to his brother, whose dice-throw he could not beat.

By this time the palace was in confusion, yet none dared try to curb the frenzy of their monarch's play. Then, hearing of the calamity that was befalling their lord, whom they called the lord of earth and the ornament of the age, the whole body of citizens and the chief councillors of state attended at the gates to beg him to desist from his terrible folly. A messenger hastened to the apartments of Damayanti to tell her that the citizens and officers of state were without, and besought her to inform the king how troubled they were by the misfortunes that were descending upon one of such rare virtue and magnificence. Whereupon the distracted Damayanti, overwhelmed with grief, went unto her husband and entreated him to go to the gate, where waited his loyal people, eager to speak with him. Many times she entreated him thus, but the king did not move, nor uttered one word to the lamentations of his wide-eyed queen, nor saw the sad, grief-laden glances. The people at the gates, when they heard of this, made loud their grief and returned home dejectedly, saying: "'Tis not

he, ' tis not the king, 'tis some vile *vetala*, who has eaten Nala's soul."

And in their human ignorance they did not know how truly they had spoken. The second day ended. All his personal wealth had been surrendered unto Pushkara, but with the dawn of the third day, when the flaming eye of the world was mounting high in the heavens, even the king's palace and all its gilded couches, the litters, the silken cushions and coverlets, the hangings and even the queen's garments had been staked and lost, and still the game went on.

Damayanti, troubled by her lord's recklessness, and apprehensive of the calamity that hung over their heads like the threatening clouds of an oncoming storm, wept in the arms of her old nurse, who had accompanied her from king Bhima's court, and for some time they deliberated on what was to be done. At length the queen rose and begged her trusted nurse to summon the councillors in the king's name and to tell them what had befallen. For the last time they urged her to go unto the king and bid him retire from the game before it was too late, saying : " The goddess of eloquence resides in thy mouth

and the fortune of the kingdom in the lotus of thy hand." So for the last time she approached her husband and implored him to grant an audience to the councillors who were without, but he was as one deaf and blind to her entreaties and would not even deign to look at her. In her heart was the hot season of anguish; full of shame and dismay she returned to her apartments, where, abandoning all hope, realising that all was lost, she made her nurse seek out Varshneya, the king's faithful charioteer, and bring him before her. She commanded him to do her bidding, reminding him of the trust the king placed in him, and how much in need of help and of a loyal messenger Nala stood, for the more he lost to Pushkara the more absorbed he became in the game, and his ardour grew to the exclusion of all else. Bending earnestly towards him, she said: "I am distraught; Nala may come to great harm. Haste now and yoke to the car the favourite horses of the king, those horses fleeter than the wind, and take with you my children, my son and daughter, and travel fast to the city of Kundina. Leave my little ones with my kinsmen and you yourself stay there also, or go wherever you wish."

With these words she gave the messenger a letter to her father, mighty king Bhima, written on a leaf of birch-bark, and placed it in an earthen vessel, sealing the top thereof with wax. Bowing low before the queen, the charioteer, having received these orders, quickly withdrew to prepare for the journey. He reported Damayanti's wish to the assembled councillors, who were all agreed that the queen was indeed wise and far-seeing to ensure the safety of the royal children by sending them without delay to be tended at her father's court, for none could say how this terrible game would end.

At noon of the same day the charioteer set out from the country of the Nishadas, taking the children with him; swift and secret had been his departure; and, once he had left the city, his horses galloped with surpassing speed towards their destination; over the plains, over mountains and rivers, through dense forests led the way; but all the while the vessel of his mind was filled with thoughts of king Nala: "O lord of earth, when the cloud of thy hand began its auspicious ascent in the two quarters of the heavens, it rained the nectar-flood of gold; to-day it raineth the waters of woe and despair." On and on

the horses paced; once as they crossed a great river, Varshneya said aloud: "Temporal blessings are like foam upon the water," but no one heard him, for the children had fallen asleep with their arms about each other, and there was only the sound of the rushing waters, as they flowed down to the sea. When the cold rays of the moon were rising, they passed through a great city whose domes and temples and palaces shimmered in the pale light of early evening; singing and music was wafted to them on the still air, and Varshneya thought: "Youth passes like a shadow, and riches disappear like clouds before the wind, therefore to virtue alone should we hold fast." Night came, enfolding the three weary travellers in its star-embroidered mantle, and the night was so clear that they were able to continue their journey, only halting occasionally to rest the steaming horses.

Eventually Kundina was reached; travel-stained, the royal children and Varshneya appeared before king Bhima, into whose charge he rendered up Indrasen and Indrasena, and, having delivered Damayanti's letter to her father, he paid homage to that mighty king, of whom it is said that, when his loud-sounding drums are struck, the hearts

of his enemies break like jars. Leaving behind him the gorgeous car and flashing steeds at the court of Kundina, the charioteer bid farewell to his charges and their kinsfolk and set out on foot, wandering afar, sorrowing. After many days, footsore and mournful, he arrived at the city of Ayodhya, where ruled the great king Rituparna, who, hearing of the charioteer's sad story, commanded him to be brought into his august presence and offered him the office of charioteer at his court; and so it came about that Varshneya entered the service of that monarch, king Rituparna, who was a store-house of various glorious achievements.

Meanwhile in the great hall, where the game of dice between the two brothers was still progressing, the whole court watched fascinated in complete silence; one could hear the gentle swish of the white chowries, which the tall slaves waved mechanically to and fro. Now and again the courtiers would exchange glances, or raise their hands in a gesture of anxiety, or shake their heads. Pushkara had already won the whole of Nala's kingdom and whatsoever else of personal wealth he had possessed,

until at last Nala, whose face was pale and haggard, rose from the board, as if to end the game, and wearily passed his hand across his brow. Then Pushkara laughed provokingly, encouraging him: "Let us play on, let us finish the game, but what is there left for thee to stake? Only Damayanti remaineth, all else of thine have I won. Wilt thou stake thy queen?"

These mocking words stabbed the virtuous king's heart, piercing it like a red-hot diamond needle of wrath, but he made no answer. His countenance was grim, torn between rage and anguish, but no word passed his lips. With terrible eye gazing down upon his brother, proudly king Nala stripped off the magnificent ornaments that adorned every part of his body. He unclasped the jewelled bracelets which, in his trembling hands, flashed like lightning, and threw them on the board. At last, having divested himself of all his splendid garments, attired in a simple loin-cloth, his beautiful body uncovered, he bade farewell to his friends and departed. As one dazed he descended the palace steps; Damayanti, clad also in a single garment, followed close behind him, so close that with every step she trod on his shadow. Until

evening they roamed thus about the city, then she laid her hand on his arm and spoke words of comfort to her lord. When it was quite dark they sought shelter in the humbler dwellings of the poor quarter of the city, but none would take them in, for Pushkara had issued a proclamation that he who should show hospitality to Nala would be doomed to death. So the unhappy outcasts wandered on towards the outskirts of the town, where they sought refuge for three days and three nights, but the pangs of hunger afflicted them, who during those days had subsisted on water alone, and they were driven to go in search of roots and wild fruits along a tedious and desolate road.

Many days they strayed, tortured by the agonies of famine, through forests and fields and mountainous valleys, until Nala one day chanced to see ahead of him some birds of golden plumage, marvellous to behold. With each movement their feathers glistened in the sunshine, and one imagined some strange artificer who had wrought and beaten those massive wings of reddish-gold—gold gathered in some celestial region unimagined by mortal mind. When the king saw these amazing

birds, he said bitterly to himself: "These birds shall be my banquet to-day, and their golden plumage shall be my sole wealth," and with that he slipped off his garment, and stealthily creeping near to where they rested on the ground, threw it so that it covered them.

But lo! instead of capturing the fowls, he saw his garment rise up into the blue, borne away by their wings. The birds soared and circled above him, and when they beheld the king nude and wretched with his head bowed to the ground, they addressed him: "O foolish one, we are the very same dice by which thou hast forfeited thy kingdom, and we have followed thee hither to deprive thee of thy loin-cloth, for it irks us to know thou shouldst even have one piece of rag left," and after uttering these words the birds departed, flying through the air, and were lost to sight. Then Nala, finding himself deprived of his last shred of clothing, turned to Damayanti, lamenting: "O beautiful, faultless one; they who have robbed me of my kingdom, whose influence hath brought all this ruin upon me, having assumed the form of birds, have carried away my only garment. I have fallen on evil days, I am grief-stricken and bereft of my senses,

but I am thy lord and thou must listen to the counsel I give thee for thy own good. Behold, that way lie the many roads which lead to the country of the South, passing by the city of Avanti and the mountains of Rikshavat; yonder is that mighty range of Vindhya; and there the river Payoshni running seawards; and yonder far away are the abodes of the ascetics who live on nuts and wild fruits. This road here leadeth to thy country of the Vidarbhas, and that to the country of the Kosalas, and beyond these roads lies the southern country." In his distress Nala repeated these words over and over again to his queen, until she, overcome with grief, answered him thus: "O king, when I think of thy purpose, my heart trembleth, my limbs become faint. How can I go and leave thee in the lone wood, thou who art despoiled of thy kingdom, of thy wealth, who hast no garment left, and art worn out with hunger and travelling? When lost in the deep woods, fatigued, faint with hunger, thou thinkest of thy former bliss, I will, great monarch, soothe thy weariness. There is no physician equal to a wife, say the wise men, and it is true indeed, O my king."

And Nala made answer: "Slender-waisted Damayanti,

it is even as thou hast said. To a man in distress there is no friend or medicine to equal a wife. Wherefore art thou afraid, my timid one? dost thou dread that I shall renounce thee? I can forsake myself, but thee I cannot forsake, my beloved, whose face is like the petal of a lotus, whose speech is cool like sandal-wood."

Then said Damayanti: "If, O mighty lord, thou intendest not to forsake me, why dost thou show me the way to the country of the Vidarbhas? I know thou wouldst not desert me willingly, but when thou art distracted, lord of earth, thou mayest. Why dost thou point out to me that way again and again? Is not my grief enough? If thou dost decree that I should go to my kinsfolk, then let us both wend our way to the country of the Vidarbhas; the king, my father, will receive thee with respect, and honoured by him, O giver of honours, thou shalt live happily in our home."

But Nala replied: "Great is thy father's kingdom, as was once my own; I appeared there once in glory, to enhance thy joy, how can I go there now in misery, to increase thy grief? There is as vast a difference between our present state and that which has been, as there is

between a fire-fly and the sun, between a grain of mustard-seed and the golden mountain, between glass and gold, between a date plant and the wishing-tree of paradise."

Many times as they wandered on, wearied by hunger and thirst, the heartbroken Nala repeated those words to Damayanti, and they, who were formerly attired in damask and cloth of gold, now roamed through the deserted wood clothed in a single cloth.

When night came on and they were exhausted and parched, they espied a deserted hut that was often used by tired travellers. Thither they dragged their lagging limbs with their last store of energy, and, fainting with fatigue, fell upon the bare earth within the dark shadows of the hut. Almost at once, the king of the Nishadas, with his beautiful princess in his arms, dust-stained and haggard as they were, felt the oblivion of sleep stealing upon him, but Damayanti, whose tender body ached in all its gentle curves, wept bitterly with pain and distress of heart, until night too caressed her soul, and soothed her sobbing into deepest sleep. Yet even then her fair

bosom rose and fell in a sea of anxiety, and soft moans and gentle sighs mingled with the heavy breath of slumber.

Before long, when the sharp edge of his fatigue was blunted, Nala awoke, for his heart and mind were stirred by tempestuous and troublous thoughts. He thought of his kingdom, of his loyal citizens, he saw his palace of the thousand fountains, and courts cool to the midday sun; he groaned in bitterness, thinking of those friends who had deserted him in his need. Then all the agony of that journey through the tangled woods recurred to him, and he bethought himself: "I have lost my throne, my elephants, my chariots, I have lost my sumptuous palace and my servants, what is the use of this? O mighty Indra, sitting in thy heavens, invite me, eager to join thee. Or if I act not thus, should I desert my wife, who is so devoted to me and suffereth all this for my sake? If I leave her sleeping here, she can at least on the morrow wander towards Vidarbha, her father's house. Her devotion to me, if she stayeth with me, will make her share all my distress, while if I leave her now, she will perchance find the protection of her home, and some day, maybe, even the happiness I cannot give her will be hers.

Wherever she goeth, she will be detected as being a great princess, by the rays of light shooting forth from the moon of her face."

So his anguished mind debated, until he was convinced that the best course to take was to desert his beloved Damayanti, persuading himself that her high fame and auspicious fortune, as well as her native energy, would protect her from all harm. Yet throughout this fierce deliberation Nala's lofty mind was influenced by the wicked Kali, who within the body of the king lay so close to the beautiful figure of Damayanti and desired her more than ever. Thereupon the poor king made up his mind and stole from the side of Damayanti, leaving her fast asleep on the bare ground. But realising his own nakedness, he felt that he must cut off half of the single garment which clothed the sleeping princess. He walked up and down the narrow hut, pondering how he could do that without awaking her; he could think of nothing and crept outside the hut. The night was almost gone, and the emaciated moon was, so to speak, wasting away; that lamp, having come into the power of sleep, seemed drowsily to nod. He saw the trees, ghost-like, and

heard the wild-beast cries echoing faintly, and suddenly he perceived a brightness under the bushes; he bent down to pick it up and to his surprise he saw that it was an unsheathed sword of shining silver, most beautiful in shape with strange ornamentations. Stealthily he crept back to the hut and with it cut off half of Damayanti's garment, which he then wrapped about his body. He then turned to go, but his heart failed him, and he took one more look at his beauteous wife, and seeing her so helpless, sighing in her sleep, burst into bitter tears. "Alas!" he bewailed, "my beloved, whose likeness the gods of wind and sun have never seen, sleepeth to-day on the bare ground like one forlorn. Clad in that severed cloth she lieth like one that dreameth. Her body, though she is unadorned, is sanctified by infinite beauty, and I proclaim her as the thief of all the wealth of my heart. How will the daughter of Bhima, devoted to her lord, but separated and solitary, wander through these deep woods inhabited by beasts and serpents? O blessed one, may the Adityas and the Vasus and the twin Ashvins and the Maruts protect thee; thy virtue thy best guardian is!"

So he turned and departed from the hut. Yet one more look he must have of his dear wife, peerless on earth in beauty, and as often as he moved to go, dragged away by Kali, his great love drew him back. The heart of the wretched king was rent in twain, and, like a swing, he kept going out of the cabin and coming back again. At length, stripped and bereft of reason by the evil Kali, the king went away, forsaking his sleeping wife, leaving her alone in that solitary forest.

## CHAPTER IV

ORNING came, the sun mounted behind the ramparts of eternal verdure, and beauteous Damayanti awoke to the singing of birds in that vast and lonely forest. A slight smile parted her lips; refreshed now, her cheek glowed again as she began to stir drowsily; but what dismay blanched her countenance, stiffened her body as she started upright, when she saw her lord Nala was not beside her. She screamed: "O my husband, why hast thou deserted me? I am lost, alone in this vast forest. O vanished prince, thou hast pledged thy word; thou art just, yet hast thou deserted thy wife, devoted to thee even in thy penury and misfortune. O crest-jewel of all kings, thou shouldst act faithfully as thou didst promise before the guardians of the world. If I live one instant now, it is because, as mortal, my death is destined at another time."

Beside herself with terror and anguish, she rushed

hither and thither under the trees, stumbling over the undergrowth; she called upon him to come back, now thinking it was only a playful hiding, only a joke, now believing that she saw him behind a thicket. She shrank in terror from the dancing shadows; the sunbeams quivered upon her hair as she sprang up with a cry and darted forward, or fell down in stuporous agony upon the leaves. The birds in the trees about her by their tumult seemed to have caught her grief, while a soft sound made the leaves sigh in unison for her. Suddenly she leapt up, burning and quivering with anguish and fervour, and through her torrents of tears exclaimed: "Cursed be he who hath afflicted Nala; his grief shall be greater than ours. That demon who hath possessed Nala of the sinless heart shall be more miserable and bear greater ills!"

So, like one demented, she began to roam through the wild forest, beset by beasts of prey, by lions, bears and leopards, crying all the while like an osprey-bird for its lost mate. She tore her way through the tangle of ferns, of climbing, wondrous-foliaged plants which were tinged like flowers with dull-red, violet and pale carmine, or

striped with white, like the veinings of a reptile's back, or spotted with eyes like those of a butterfly's wing; now crouching, now parting the dense creepers with her arms, or stepping over rocks, she staggered onward, blind to everything but her shattering grief, until she trod upon the coils of a gigantic and hungry snake, which lay sunning itself in the warm undergrowth across the path. Immediately it enfolded her in its huge embrace, yet even then she cared not for herself, but cried aloud that when Nishada was freed from his curse and restored in mind and wealth, there would be no one to comfort and love him.

A certain huntsman ranging through the deep forest heard her piercing lamentations and hurried to the spot. There he beheld the large-eyed Damayanti fainting in the coils of the snake, and, rushing towards it, slashed off its head with his sharp sword. The huntsman freed Damayanti from the dead coils, and having washed her limbs and sprinkled water on her face, he fed and comforted her and said: "Thou who hast eyes like a young gazelle, who art thou and why art thou lost in these sombre woods? How hath such beauty fallen upon

such misery?" Then Damayanti told him all that had happened. And as he listened, that rough huntsman beheld that bewitching princess, clad in but half a garment, reclining upon his arm. He saw the deep bosom and rounded hips, the delicate and faultless limbs, her fair face as bright as the full moon and the long curving lashes over her large eyes like the pointed darts of Kama's bow. He heard her voice as sweet as honey, and was inflamed by wild desire, for in his heart was the smarting wound which the shaft of the flowery-arrowed god inflicts. He began to soothe her with winning voice and soft words, his horny hand caressing the soft ripple of her thigh.

The chaste and beauteous Damayanti, perceiving his intentions, was filled with wrath and blazed up in fierce anger. But the infuriated huntsman, fanned into a fury of desire by this, attempted to obtain her by force, who was as unconquerable as a flame. The queen in white-hot anger cursed him: "Never have I thought of any other than Nishada, therefore mayest thou die for this indignity." Straightway that hunter fell down lifeless, like a tree struck by lightning.

Then the lotus-eyed queen rose up and ran on through the fearful forest, now ringing with the chirp of crickets, under arched creeper-clad branches and slender-stalked palms whose leaves drooped towards the ground. Here the dark groves were infested with thieves and marauding tribes. In this green world lions roamed and velvet-footed panthers crouched in the long *kusha*-grass, ready to hurl their lithe, black bodies upon the cheetul deer or the lordly sambhur stag going down to the lagoons to drink at evening. Among the feathered palms and the areca trees innumerable monkeys screeched and jibbered, swinging themselves from bough to bough, raining as they moved the plentiful golden fruit on to the ground, like Indra's hail-stones. Lizards, green shimmering arrows, darted across her path and hid under the flowering cactus, whose scarlet blossoms flamed like torches. But noon wore on, the vertical rays of the sun plunged the forest into somnolence and torpor; everything began to look faded and tarnished in the excessive light, so that the outlines and contours were blurred in a glow of dazzling pallor.

Damayanti, at length having reached a many-creeked

lagoon surrounded by huge mountains, sank on a thick granite-block exhausted. Her eyes travelled over the shining expanse of slumbering water, mirroring the clouds and sky, and she felt glad to be free from the oppressing network of leaves above her head. The air was heavy and motionless. Fascinated she watched the bubbles of air which made eddies on the surface of that treacherous water, for she knew that each bubble was breathed out by a crocodile, who basked in the warm mud, which also was the home of tortoises and poisonous toads, and the silent world of water-snakes. Then she looked up to the mountains so rich in ores, with yellow orpement and vermilion caves, and red hematite like burning beacons, and red chalk, and minerals of the hue of collyrium and many others, like white and sable clouds. Though her tired feet could hardly carry her, she would not rest for long; on she journeyed through tunnelled groves resounding with the notes of winged choirs. She saw wondrous glens covered with masses of white blossoms, as if some god had passed, scattering handfuls of stars amid the greenery of labyrinthian-stemmed banyan trees. She saw great rivers and lakes, rock-pools, and

sometimes a blue jay would skim along the crystalline water and vanish in a bed of lilies and floating reeds. She beheld countless terrors of the wood, goblins and Rakshasas of grim visage. She passed by deep wells and tarns and hillocks, brooks and fountains from which clear cool water welled and invited her to drink. She met herds of buffaloes and wild-boars, and she saw serpents hanging from the trees and hissing at her, but safe in virtue and glory Damayanti wandered in search of her lord, nor was she distressed by anything in that dark forest, save her separation from her beloved Nala.

Presently, overcome with misery and fatigue, she sat down again on a jagged slab of stone, not far from where a crouching tiger watched her with bright eyes and snarling jaws. Then her sobs burst forth again and she rocked herself in wild laments: "O mighty hero, whither hast thou gone? O tiger among men, hast thou played false to me only, thou who observest faith in all things else? O bull among kings, best of men, surely thou dost remember what the sky-ranging swans spake in thy presence and in mine? By all the four Vedas thou must keep thy vows. O my warrior Nala, how

this monarch of the forest beasts frightens me! Saidst thou not often: 'Thee alone I love'? Couldst thou but say these words to me now! Why dost thou not see me as I am, thin and pale, scratched and dusty, scarcely clad in this half-garment, I who am forlorn and frightened, like a doe separated from the herd? Wheresoever thou art, it is I, Damayanti, who, alone in the forest, calleth to thee. Why then dost thou not reply? Whom can I ask in this terrible forest, saying: 'Hast thou seen illustrious Nala in these woods?' Whom shall I hear to-day reply with the sweet words: 'Royal Nala, of eyes like lotus-leaves, is even here'? Now the lithe tiger with graceful gait stalks towards me; his four teeth gleam yellow; his high cheek-bones are striped above the moist, quivering nostrils. Him will I ask." Then, turning desperately towards the tiger, she said: "Thou art lord of all animals and king of the forest. Comfort me, O king of beasts, with news of Nala if thou hast seen him. Or if thou canst tell me nought, devour me and free me from this misery."

But the lordly tiger heeded not the plaintive appeal that echoed through the jungle, and glided down like a

tawny shadow to the crystal river that rolls towards the sea.

Damayanti then turned for tidings of her king to the high and sacred mountain, which in the distance reared its head above the jungle, crested with innumerable heaven-kissing peaks, all tinged with rainbow colours. This marvellous mountain abounding in fabulous ores, decked with divers gems, rose like a banner over the broad forest wherein lions and elephants roared and trumpeted, where, on big-leafed *shami* and ebony trees, peacocks sat, spreading their tails, so that it looked as if the trees were wearing crowns of scintillating precious stones. There were flocks of other winged creatures; green parrots screamed under the spreading canopy of leaves, dark ravens sat in groups, forming sombre patches; here and there cranes flew past, and a russet crow-pheasant was lost behind cascades of hibiscus flowers.

The queen, perceiving all the life around her, then, stretching out her arms imploringly, addressed that lofty mountain thus: "O sacred mountain, I bow to thee; O pillar of earth, I bow to thee. Know me for a king's daughter, a king's daughter-in-law, and a king's wife

named Damayanti. Bhima of the Vidarbhas is my sire, Nala of the Nishada is my lord. O king of mountains, it is of that righteous, soma-quaffing, fire-adoring king I am the spouse, king Nala, whose skin is golden like the filament of the lotus. O refuge of the distressed, hast thou not seen, with thy hundred peaks towering up into the sky, where king Nala wandereth oppressed by calamity in this frightful forest? O, when shall I hear again the voice of my lord, gentle and deep as that of the clouds, sweet as *Amrita*, as musical as the chaunting of the Vedas? O king of mountains, fear possesses my soul, comfort me!"

Vainly she spake. The far-distant mountain heard her not, and soon its austere summit was turned towards the dense pillow of the night, its radiant colours washed away by enshrouding mists, until its solemn hush over all proclaimed its sleep. Where Damayanti lay, half-swooning in her grief, she fell into a stupor that was scarcely slumber, for her voice cried aloud for Nala, and her bosom heaved with dolorous sighs. Through her mind ghoulish fears and mocking shapes twined and untwined ceaselessly, imaginary monsters threatened her,

whilst far away, falling into dire peril at every step, was Nala, striving desperately to come to her. All through that heavy night she tossed in this delirium, unable to rest one moment from the torture of her sorrow. Those wakeful hours seemed interminable under the mysterious interlacings of overhanging trees, whose myriads of trailing roots drooped from extended branches, like tresses of raven hair. Thousands of stars glinted through the smallest gap among the twigs, whilst under the leaves crowds of fire-flies flitted like sparks of flame, so that it was difficult to distinguish which were stars and which were fire-flies. Ghost-white blossoms swung in long clusters like bells from invisible cords dropped from Indra's heaven, but instead of sound they exhaled a sweet fragrance into the air, like the intoxicating incense burnt for deities in towering temples. In the morning she was wakened by the call of the cuckoos in the mango trees above her. She drew herself up from the curling ferns and stumbled onwards blindly towards the north. For three days and three nights she wandered thus, and each night of sleep was as full of terror as the day; there was no oblivion, no rest.

On the third day she came to a cool glen that was like a green isle in the heart of that surging jungle. It was a leafy abode of holy ascetics, men who have crossed the ocean of mundane existence and have given up their lives to meditation. Here in this charming hermitage, resembling in beauty a celestial grove, dwelt holy men, who by self-denial and control of minds and passions were seeking the way to heaven. They clad themselves in barks of trees and deer-skins, and were like bees, not depending on any person for food, delighting in scraps which the forest yielded, Nature's ungrudging gifts; their senses subdued, they were eminently blessed and beloved by the gods. Damayanti, beholding this peaceful retreat and the herds of deer and groups of monkeys that abounded there, was greatly cheered.

She entered that habitation, walking over the soft green sward, and after saluting those ascetics grown old in the practice of austerities, stood in an attitude of humility. And those hermits of the forest welcomed her, bade her be at ease and rest, inquiring kindly what they might do for her. Whereupon the queen asked: "Ye sinless and holy men, is it well with your sacrificial

fire and the ceremonious duties of your order? Is it well with the birds and beasts of the hermitage?" While the queen thus inquired the venerable concourse of holy men saw the marvellous beauty of Damayanti, as she stood there half-naked like the slender horn of the moon in a cloudy sky, her figure like a branch of sweet basil to bewilder man's fancy. They saw her eyes that resembled stars, showing beneath eyebrows curved in flexile grace; her white teeth like strung camomile petals sparkling between the poppies of her lips; her long tresses scarce concealing her breasts, which, like twin granadoes, flashed their ripeness in the hot sun; and her swaying hips like the gait of a young gazelle. So dazzled by her splendour were they that they asked: "O blameless one, art thou the presiding deity of the forest, or of the mountain, or of the river?"

But Damayanti replied: "I am neither goddess of forest, mountain nor river; I am just a mortal. O holy Rishis, I will tell you my story!" Thereupon Damayanti related all that had happened to her beloved Nala, how he had lost all in a game of dice, how she had followed him when destitute into the woods, how he had forsaken

her to the innumerable dangers of the jungle, for he was torn from her in the stifling midnight by evil powers. She told them how she had suffered, wandering and searching for her king of men amidst prolific forests, craggy mountains, lakes and darksome pools. She asked them: "O dwellers of the sacred grove, hath the lord of the Nishadas come to this delightful shelter? I am so weary of the terrible panther-haunted wilderness, that if I see not my Nala soon, I shall find release and renounce this body of mine; for of what use is life to me without the bright lamp of his love?"

As her piteous story ended, there fell such a hush over the unceasing noises of the forest, the blithe sounds of that hermits' glade, that it was like the silence of the sea of infinitude. Those ancient visionaries then replied in the sonorous tones of truth: "O daughter of Bhima, by our prophetic power we see that the future will bring happiness to thee, for love is like the abode of splendour enshrined in thy heart; thou shalt see Nala freed from distress and from all sins, clothed once more in radiant gems, reigning in the city of his fathers."

No sooner had this prophecy been uttered than those

ancient ascetics, with their sacred fires and all that sunbeam spangled hermitage, vanished from sight. And the amazed Damayanti of the faultless limbs beheld nothing but the narrow avenue through the shadowy forest, down which the light filtered in blinding parallels. What had happened? Was it all a dream, a mere illusion, or the ruthless work, the sport of fickle Maya? How could it have disappeared, the hermitage, the sacred waters, the rich trees heavy with fruits and flowers? And her sweet smiles gave way to grief and melancholy. It had all been a dream, and evermore she must wander on.

Through a clump of bamboo she pushed her way, where, as she passed, she heard the silken swish of sharp leaves against the frail tall canes, whose tops swayed gently far above her. She walked under palms which reared their plumed heads high into the air, supported by long delicate stems, and they shone in the sunlight as if they had been varnished. Presently she came upon an *Ashoka* tree, which is the first in the forest, brilliant with flowers and its load of foliage, and echoing with the notes of birds. Before this tree she began to weep, saying: "O graceful tree in the heart of the forest,

flower-decked and radiant like a king of hills, O beautiful Ashoka, free me from grief! Vindicate thy name, Ashoka, for thy name meaneth destroyer of grief! Hast thou seen king Nala, slayer of foes, come into this wilderness?"

And pitiable Damayanti walked round the tree thrice, then plunged into a more terrible part of the jungle.

The evening sun was sinking slowly like a great golden ball into a sea of deep emerald, leaving a dazzling sky of lovely tints spread above the tranquil world. In the twilight mosquitoes hovered in clouds on the still air, and the humming of insects gradually rose, floated and fell, and was taken up again by myriads of tiny winged creatures, sounding like some great gathering of unearthly musicians. Damayanti brushed them aside with a fern-wisp which she had plucked. At last she came out upon a clearing, curtained on three sides by forests of palms, whose mystery and depth seemed increased by the growing dusk. With vast wonder she saw before her a body of merchants with horses and elephants and camels beside the banks of a river. This broad stretch of clear, cool water was lovely to behold. It was covered

with floating reeds and bushes of canes, studded with many islets, around which swam shoals of fishes, water-snakes and tortoises.

When Damayanti saw the pitched tents of the caravan, she ran forward wild with joy, but she was so thin and pale, her face grimed with dust, her hair matted and dishevelled, that she looked like one demented. Some of the men fled in fear, others shouted at her, some laughed, and others abused her. But there were a few who, feeling pity, spoke to her, and asked who she was and what she sought in the wood. "Art thou human," they said, "or art thou goddess of the forest or of this mountain, or of the points of the heaven? Art thou a female Yaksha or Rakshasa or a celestial damsel? If thou art, O faultless one, then protect us, and bless this caravan, that it may go hence in prosperity, and the welfare of us all be ensured."

So once again the weary Damayanti explained that she was no goddess, but a mere mortal, who was searching for her lost husband, king Nala. The leader of the caravan, named Suchi, then swore by Manibhadra, the celestial guardian of travellers, that he had not met with

any man or woman, save only herself, in all that fearful jungle. In answer to Damayanti's question concerning their destination, the leader replied: "This caravan, O daughter of a great king, is bound direct with costly merchandise for the city of Suvahu, the wise king of the Chedis. Come thou and rest awhile, take food, and on the morrow travel thither with us." Therefore the queen stayed with the caravan that night and proceeded with them the next day, hoping to set eyes upon her beloved lord on the way.

For many days the merchants travelled through the densest part of the forest, until they saw, opening in marvellous vista, the quiet waters of a wide lake, fragrant with lotuses of every hue. The tangled undergrowth gave place to grassy knolls and isolated copses, so that the margin of the lake was most beautiful and captivating to the heart. Here towards evening the caravan halted, and with the permission of their leader, the merchants spread themselves out along the green and shady banks of the many-creeked lagoon. Before long all were wrapped in profound sleep, and the moon looked down upon a silent camp. Through the forest throbbed the

padding of a distant herd, a jackal howled near by, and the owls whirred through the branches. The moon clomb to her zenith, while over the slumbering caravan by the lotus-lake the hush of midnight descended.

But deep in the forest the thunder of wild elephants herding towards a stream to drink rumbled nearer and nearer; now and again the trumpeting of the bulls sounded hollowly and muffled by the weight of foliage. Soon the discernible cracking of dried wood, the crashing of falling branches and woody creepers, the sharp snap of the breaking bamboo, showed how close they were to the purling stream that entered one end of the lake. The thunder of the hundred feet sounded more ominous, more excited; while all about the region of the stream the frightened birds screamed overhead and monkeys chattered and scurried upon the branches. A slight breeze blew across the lake, making each folded lotus bow gently in its sleep, rippling the water so that each lotus-leaf rocked to and fro like a tiny barque at anchor. But that same breeze carried to the wild and stamping herd the pungent odour of their tamed fellows confined within the camp-lines of the caravan. Down by the

stream the dark mass of the herd could be seen moving by the water, the moon glinting occasionally upon the white ivory of a tusk or extended leaf-like ear. Suddenly they scrambled together, veered round from the water, and with redoubled trumpetings thrashed the offending air with upraised sinuous trunks. Then down swept the maddened herd upon the sleeping traders' camp. The noise of elephants' trumpeting, the force, the irreparable ruin of their strides, was like the rolling of a thousand peaks, loosened from the summits of Himalaya, crashing far below into the valley of the Five Rivers. All the pathways that issued from the forest edge towards a margin of that lake of lotuses were encumbered by sleeping groups of merchants. And before they were properly awakened by the tremendous noise of that onslaught, so swift was the headlong rush, they were trampled to death even where they lay. Within the camp the elephants of burden, the camels and the horses, had dragged their ropes and hobbles, and were charging about in hideous confusion, goring each other, tearing over the helpless men, and scattering the piles of bales, the coffers filled with precious things far and wide.

The merchants, blinded by sleep, terrified by the shrieks of the injured, the noise of the enraged animals, the panic of disorder, fled in all directions, into the lake, into the adjacent copses, or climbed trees. Some, as they ran screaming, defenceless, were slain by charging tusks or heavy hoofs. Others, whisked from their feet by the whirling trunks, were tossed high over the banyan trees. Camels, horses, men and elephants were fighting each other in their terror. Presently the overturned braziers set fire to the scattered linens, carpets and damascenes, and the flames, fanned by the breeze from across the lake, roared and crackled through the grasses, like the angry breath of Agni, all-devouring and relentless.

Damayanti woke up whilst the fearful uproar and pandemonium was at its height; she stood appalled by the conflagration, the scene of ruin and disaster all around her. The yellow, scarlet-tipped flames shot up, hissing beside her; she shrank away as they scorched the torn half-garment that encircled her; the glow cast upon her fair body made her look like a statue of sorrow, carved in red carnelian. She saw the heaps of merchandise smoking in ruins. The wild elephants of the jungle and

the beasts of burden each had fled from their common enemy, the forest fire, and she watched the erstwhile docile beasts as they ran from the flames as frenzied as the wildest elephants. Crouching on the bank of the lotus-lake the queen fought for breath in the stifling heat of the smoking fabrics and smouldering grasses, and the stench of burnt flesh. She saw distracted wretches scrambling for the heap of jewels that were trodden into the ground; others were trying to secure beautiful golden urns and silver vessels from a pile of blazing boxes, through the burst sides of which flowed glittering streams of molten metal.

Here was slaughter and destruction capable of wakening the fear of all the worlds. And when morning came, poor Damayanti heard those who had escaped unhurt come together and with loud wails bemoan their misfortune. Some declared they had failed to worship properly the illustrious Manibhadra, the guardian of the caravans; others maintained they had neglected deities who control calamities, and others again blamed the flight of certain birds. Most vehement and distressed were those who had lost all wealth and slaves. They said: "It is that demented woman who came into our midst

in scarcely human guise, she has caused all this. She is some dread Rakshasi or Pishachi, she shall be stoned to death should we set eyes on her again." Hearing these terrible threats from all sides, the wretched queen fled fearfully into the cruel forest, where she remained in hiding, until a few Brahmans, who had survived the slaughter of the night, found her and promised her their protection. She told them what misery she felt at this consequence of her fatal ill-luck. She deserved to die, she said, and argued that only Destiny had preserved her from the savage feet of the herd. She thought that all her trials were due to the slight she had given to those celestial beings who had come to her *Svayamvara*, and whom she had passed over for the sake of Nala. But the holy Brahmans, well versed in the Vedas, comforted her and gave her fortitude. The next day the unhappy remnant of the caravan departed and, journeying without mishap for two days, arrived at the mighty city of wise Suvahu, the king of the Chedis.

They entered the gates about evening. All the citizens were amazed at the lamentable plight of the merchants, and showed them sympathy in their misfortunes, whilst

listening wide-eyed to the ghastly tales of the weary travellers. But the sight of the thin form of Damayanti, her melancholy face, pale as the autumn moon, her hair matted with dust, dishevelled, her skin all grimed with dirt and her glance as of one crazed, struck horror into the hearts of the citizens. The little boys of the city followed her, crowding round in curiosity, calling her many names. But she heeded them not, and walked on through the streets, hoping to find some kind soul who would take her in for the night; in this wise she passed by the gates of the palace. It happened that the queen-mother, who was sitting upon one of the terraces, saw the homeless princess surrounded by a crowd. She bade one of her waiting-women go and bring the forlorn stranger before her, for she saw that she was fair and in need of succour, remarking: "The fair demented one seemeth a very Shri with her large eyes!" The waiting-woman went out and dispersed the crowd, and in a little while led Damayanti on to that graceful terrace before the queen-mother, who asked: "Who art thou in such distress with so beautiful a form? Like lightning in the midst of clouds thou shinest, and if thou makest the pale-

rayed moon the decoration of thy head, what reproach is that to the lamp of the three worlds? Bereft though thou art of ornaments, thy beauty is more than human."

Thereupon the daughter of Bhima, in a hollow voice, replied: "Know me for just a woman and devoted to my husband. I am a serving woman, though of good lineage, by name Sairindhri. I wander afar, living on herbs and roots, companionless, homeless." Then she related her sad story, which so often she had told before, but this time she mentioned not her real name, nor that of Nala, nor that of any other place or person. But said simply that she sought her dear lord, who owned her heart and was like the gods in mien. When she had finished her tale, that made all who heard it weep, the queen-mother said to her: "O blessed damsel, thou shalt stay with me, for I feel for thee in thy sorrow. My men shall search for thy husband, or maybe in the course of his wanderings he will come here himself."

Damayanti then replied: "O mother of heroes, the creeper of generosity first sprang up in the earth, but it flowereth now in the garden of thy heart. Gladly I would stay with thee, but on certain conditions only may I enter

thy palace and thy service. I shall not eat the fragment of any dish, or wash anybody's feet, or speak with men. And if any man molest me, he shall be punished at thy hands. Moreover, if he should molest me again and again, then shall he be put to death. Thus have I vowed before the gods. Also, I must have an interview with those Brahmans who will set out in search of my husband. If thou wilt grant me all this, then will I stay." And the queen answered: "I will do what thou askest, thou hast done well by such a vow." Then, turning to her daughter named Sunanda, who was radiant as the dawn, she said: "O Sunanda, receive this divine lady as thy companion. Take care of her and make her joyous; let water be given unto her and clean raiment, and let her tired body be anointed with musk and sandal-oil."

And the laughing Sunanda led the pale Damayanti to her own apartments. There she lived without anxiety of any kind, for every wish was gratified, and she was treated with respect by all. Her only sorrow was that no news, no word ever came from Nala, and as the sun went to its setting, every day she thought: "It is taking away a part of my life."

## CHAPTER V

LL the many days which had elapsed since Nala deserted his princess asleep in the rude shelter, the unhappy king had spent in aimless wanderings. He had lived upon areca-nuts and the hard fruit of the wild plum; occasionally he had snared a pheasant and devoured it whilst it was yet warm. Many escapes from danger he had; once only just in time he climbed out of reach of the cruel horns of a buffalo herd as it charged across a clearing. The huge bulk of an ancient oak weighted with creepers snapped with a sound like a thunder-clap and crashed down on the spot where but a moment before he had been resting. Once he burst through a thicket and almost stumbled over a leopard crouching for its spring upon the unsuspecting deer drinking at a pool. But in that merciless jungle, where death and destruction wrestled interminably, season upon season, with exuberant life, king Nala, once so mighty, was not destined to suffer any harm.

One day he saw a great fire raging in the forest and was almost trampled to death by the rush of bewildered beasts, as they fled before the advancing bank of flame. Thinking now that his cursed life would be ended, and the peace of the hereafter attained, he faced the hot fury of the roaring tongues fearlessly. He heard the stems, the trunks, the canes and grasses crackling like the whip-lashes of the heavenly charioteers. Overhead flocks of frightened birds wheeled and dipped, at times almost engulfed by the eddies of dense smoke. Nala, now clinging to a low branch of a gigantic elm, saw the panic-driven animals tear by; deer racing beside tigers, jackals beside buffaloes, and bears and monkeys scrambling together.

Suddenly he heard a voice crying repeatedly as from the midst of the fire: "O righteous Nala, come hither, come hither!" There in the midst of the red and blinding fire was a creature calling! Nala leapt from his branch of refuge and, risking destruction from ten thousand feet, fought his way towards the wall of fire. His body ached with the heat; his eyes felt like burning pebbles; his half-garment of cloth was scorched in an instant. He

paused, gasped for breath in that smoke-laden, over-heated air, then plunged into a pool of flame. But lo! instead of falling as a charred mass of ashes, his tall golden body seemed wrapped in a great transparent cloak of innumerable and quivering colours, and the folds of that cloak floated as though stirred by a storm-wind. Still Nala heard the voice calling him; it seemed to come from the heart of the fire, from the spot that raged most fiercely.

By the ecstasy of those flames his body was tempered to the pitch of divinity; he felt like the sun-god when his towering chariot drives across the splendour of the arch of heaven. "Nala, Nala, come hither!" he heard, and he plunged into the vaporous, blazing midst of the whole conflagration. There he perceived, as soon as his eyes became accustomed to the glare, a mighty Naga whose great coils, thicker than a man's body, were heaped upon a small pyramid of rock, around which tall flames leapt and danced like a circle of hissing dervishes. The royal Naga, who was human to the waist, lay trembling and wringing his hands. His snake body of twisting and twining coils writhed in pain, and Nala saw how

the fire-light coruscated on his gorgeous scales. These were patterned like the finest mail, plates of amethyst and of coral and stripes of jet; spots like emeralds and blood-stones or peacocks' eyes decorated his back and sides, while on his hood, that overhung his head and shoulders, was set a marvellous star and a brilliant diadem of rubies; all his belly was smooth and golden as the oldest ivory, the scales being set in mosaic of most delicate form. His human face was that of a wise but wistful man, whose long years of dwelling in Patala had not worn away the first beauty of his youth.

When the snake saw Nala standing before him, he pleaded with him, saying: "Dominion is a breeze that changes and power is a lightning that deceives. O king, deliver me. My name is Karkotaka; I am the first of all snakes. Long ago I deceived the great Rishi Narada, who is of high ascetic fame, and in his wrath he cursed me, O king of men, with a terrible curse. He caused me to stay rooted to one spot like a tree, until one called Nala should come to take me up and carry me to another place, and there where he set me down should I become free from his curse. So I am unable to move from this

fiery spot, save by thy help, O Nala. It is thou who must deliver me. Do this and I will ever be thy friend. I shall be very small and light in thy hands. Carry me now speedily away to a safe place, far from the fury of this fire."

And with that the mighty Naga became as small as a thumb. When Nala had recovered from his astonishment, he picked Karkotaka up and ran fast and long from the region of the fire, until he came to a green open space quite untouched by the flames. Arriving there exhausted he was about to set down the tiny Karkotaka, when the voice of the snake arrested him: "Wait, O king of Nishada," he said, "go a little farther yet, but count thy steps as thou goest. I will reward thee with great benefits."

Accordingly the king began to count his steps, saying aloud as he went, "One! two! three! . . ." and continuing up to ten. But as he said the word ten, which also means "Bite," the snake, curled in Nala's right hand, bit him, whereupon the king dropped the serpent to the ground.

In that instant, however, a wondrous thing occurred;

the strong limbs and beautiful form of Nala began to change. In a few moments, to his utmost amazement, the king found himself transformed into a crooked and hideous dwarf. At the same time he saw Karkotaka swell and grow larger and larger until the Naga resumed all the majesty and magnificence of form which Nala had first seen. When Karkotaka saw with what horror and anxiety the king regarded his unworthy shape, he spoke to him softly and comforted him, saying: "In the hour of adversity be not without hope, for crystal rain falls from black clouds. I have taken away thy beauty that people may not recognise thee. Moreover, he who has deceived thee and caused thy ruin, who dwelleth even now within thee, shall be tortured by my venom so long as he remaineth in thy body, but thou thyself shalt receive no pain from my poison. Thus shalt thou be saved from the hands of him who hath wronged thee. Fear no longer any animals with fangs, or enemies or Brahmans versed in the Vedas. Thou shalt be victorious evermore in battle. O prince Nala, go thou this day to the delightful city Ayodhya; present thyself before king Rituparna, for the lamp of reason

resides in the brain of his head, and say: 'My name is Vahuka; I am a charioteer.' That noble king is descended from the line of Ikswaku, possessed of great wealth, and is extremely skilled in gambling. When thou hast become his friend he will impart to thee the secret of his skill in dice, in exchange for thy world-famed knowledge of the science of horses. When thou art an adept at dice, prosperity shalt thou have. Later thy wife, thy children and thy kingdom shall return to thee. I tell thee truly, therefore banish sorrow from thy mind. Shouldst thou, O lord of men, desire to resume thy proper form, remember me and wear this garment."

As Karkotaka spoke these last words to the astonished Nala he handed him two pieces of celestial cloth, and thereupon vanished from sight.

Dazed, speechless with wonderment, the king sat motionless for a while, turning over in his mind the words of the royal Naga. Realising that it would be a long journey to reach Ayodhya, for he did not know in which direction he should go, he braced himself up to take observation from the top of a neighbouring tree. When he had climbed but a few branches upwards he

found that he was no longer in the dense forest, but that the trees under which he had been reclining were part of a small wood at the head of a beautiful valley, nestling amidst the magnificent foothills of the Himalayas. The air was fresh and cool; the great peaks of the immortal mountains towered in the distance. Upon the slope of the hill he saw a man ploughing with yoked oxen at the plough. A stream went past the wood and kine were knee-deep in the bright water, drinking. Down the valley a road ran, and far away travellers were moving, looking like dots upon a white riband.

With a joyful heart Nala left the shadow of the wood and washed himself in the clear water. He then wove for himself a short vestment cut of the long rushes that were growing by the stream, for he dared not put on the garment which the Naga had given him, lest he should be recognised in his own form. Thus clothed and refreshed he set out on his way. After a few days of uneventful marching he came to the city of Ayodhya, whose towering magnificence he saw was as beautiful as it was unconquerable. It stood near a wide river which supplied the water for the three successive brick-lined

moats that surrounded the massive walls. At the four quarters opened four shining gates of cedar-wood and bronze. That on the north was dedicated to Agni, the fire-god; that on the south to Indra; the east one to Yama, the god of death; and the west one to Brahma, the creator. Besides these were many other gates at the corners and along the sides, making fifty in all, each one handsomely designed, although not so large as the god-gates. Upon the granite-bastioned and timber-buttressed walls turrets and battlements were raised, where the sentinels, far-seeing archers, could be discerned by their glittering mail and coloured cloaks.

Running crosswise through the town from east to west and north to south were the two main roads, the royal streets, which led to the four gates of the gods. They were lined by double rows of leafy palms and paved with stone slabs and planks of wood.

When Nala reached the crest of the last hill overlooking the town, where he rested awhile in a shelter provided for pilgrims, he could see the bullock-carts and chariots, the camels and asses moving busily to and fro. He crossed the great causeway that zigzagged over

the running moats to reach the vast gate of the sun. The captain of the guards demanded his business, and hearing that Nala sought service with king Rituparna, and observing that he carried no merchandise or contraband, allowed him to proceed without tax or delay.

Although much larger, Ayodhya resembled in general plan Nala's own city. It was divided into quarters by the crossed main thoroughfares, which were self-confined and guarded by turrets. At the point where these roads met was the king's palace, a lofty tower-topped building with many balconies and terraces. Around stretched the green expanse of the beautiful gardens with groves and marble water-courses, fountains and shady nooks. To the north of the palace stood the temple where Agni, the fire-god, was worshipped. Its window-slotted steeple rose higher than the roof of the palace, reflecting the sun from thousands of carved granite panels. By the temple clustered the quiet dwellings of Brahmans and master-builders, associated with whom were also the armourers, the ironsmiths and lapidaries. In the eastern quarter lived the warriors, the skilled charioteers and mahouts, and here, too, the merchants in scents, cloth

and liquor had their shops. In the west the spinners of wool, the mat-makers and leather-workers dwelt, while in the south were the stables and elephant preserves. The corners of the city were the quietest parts, and there were established the schools and colleges.

As Nala pushed through the crowds frequenting the bazaars, making his way towards the palace, he noticed that a shaded well was provided at every tenth house, and bathing pools were sunk in the public squares. Before long he arrived at the main gate of the palace, the southern one. A sentinel challenged him, and to his questions replied that the king would that very day, at the ninth hour, receive such petitions of his subjects as his chief steward had arranged. Nala was therefore taken to a small vaulted chamber, which was the office of the steward, who immediately demanded his business. "I am a charioteer," said Nala, "and I seek service with the king." The steward commanded him to return at the ninth hour, when he would be taken before king Rituparna. Accordingly, having received nourishment in one of the large guest-houses, built for the many pilgrims who came to bathe in the holy waters of the river, Nala

returned to the now open palace-gate, and, with a number of other anxious men, was conducted into the king's presence. They passed through courts, paved in strange figures with coloured marbles, through colonnades of elephant-headed pillars, across terraces whose balustrades were of carved lions and festooned lotus-wreaths. At last they came to the northern wing of the palace, where were the king's apartments and private council-room, having passed outside the sequestered quarters of the women and the regions of the kitchens.

Finally they were halted before a soaring archway closed by heavy curtains of dyed wool and guarded by two of the richly adorned archers who formed the body-guard of the king. An old councillor appeared to conduct them within one by one. Presently Nala's turn came, and the curtains parted; he stepped forward into the cool, scented room. He found himself walking upon a floor of polished rock-crystal in which his feet were mirrored as in water; he passed down an aisle of black columns which supported the gilded spandrils of a vaulted roof. The sun, shining through the eastern windows high in the outer wall, lit up the rich hangings decorating the

room. In the centre of the floor, towards the far end of the hall, sat the king upon a raised couch of beaten bronze that gleamed a dull red, surrounded by drapings in tissue of gold. His body-guard of archers stood behind, while the councillor read aloud Nala's petition, and the king looked curiously at the dwarfish exterior of the prince of the Nishadas.

Nala saluted king Rituparna, and when ordered to state his experience said: "My name is Vaḥuka. There is no one in the world to equal me in the management of horses. I am wise in all matters of difficulty and all affairs of skill. In the art of cooking I surpass all others. I strive to attain success in all the arts that exist; in a number of tasks difficult of accomplishment. O king, show me the fruit of thy favour, and let me enter thy service, since I seek thy employment."

And the king was well pleased by this speech, for he had long cherished the wish to be taught the mysteries of horsemanship, so that he could drive like the wind; but so far he had met no one who claimed to be the first man among charioteers. Also the haughty demeanour of Vahuka appealed to him in spite of his ungainly figure.

So he ordered Vahuka to take charge of his stables, directing Varshneya to work under him. In this way Nala obeyed the command of the Naga and became the chief and trusted charioteer of Rituparna. He lived quietly in the city of Ayodhya and was respected by all. Although Nala recognised his faithful servant Varshneya, who, whilst he himself was dicing away his kingdom, had carried his children to safety, yet he did not reveal himself, and that worthy man never guessed how near he was to his former master.

Every evening he excited the curiosity of his companions, for Nala recited the following prayer:

> "Where lieth she by famine, thirst and toil
> Outworn, in whom rank grief hath sown its seed?
> Thinks she of me who left her in her need?
> Or does her arm about another coil?"

Once Jivala overheard the strange dwarf reciting this in his sleep, and on the following morning he asked him: "For whom art thou mourning, O Vahuka? Whose spouse dost thou lament, thou who art wise in years?"

And the charioteer answered: "There was a man

who had a wife, famous the world over for her beauty, which intoxicated like the heavy scent of night-blooming lilies. Calamity came upon him and he lost all that he had, but his faithful wife followed him to the woods to comfort him in his wretchedness. She would have shared whatsoever he suffered. But in the night the evil that was within him drove him to desert her, and he left her alone in the wide and terrible forest, abounding with beasts of prey. Separated from her, that man wandered far, oppressed by woe, and rested not by day or night. Yet every evening he chanted that prayer; every night he remembered her. Then, having wandered through the entire world, he found refuge at last in quiet toil, but always he remembered her—that woman, whose presence would make even the underworld seem a mansion of delight, a prison seem like a rose-garden."

## CHAPTER VI

IN the city of Kundina great preparations were afoot. Ever since the arrival of his daughter's children, and the tragic news which Varshneya, the charioteer, had brought, king Bhima had been in a fever of unrest. Neither he nor the queen had slept for many nights, but had walked the terraces in the cool of midnight, asking themselves how and where their beautiful Damayanti and her godlike Nala could be found. The royal anxiety was reflected in the ceaseless vigils at the shrines, the lighting of holy fires around the altars, and the prayers and sacrifices of the people in the carven temples. Ancient Brahmans intoned the sonorous music of the Vedas, and sought by many practices and mystic rites some augury that would assist the king. Bhima would not be pacified by promises and prognostications, and as the days went by with still no news of Damayanti, he grew desperate and resolved to scour the whole world

in search of her. Therefore he summoned the wisest of the Brahmans to appear before him, and in full divan, surrounded by his three sons, who continually urged him to be revenged on Pushkara through immediate war, delivered the following decree :

" Worthy Brahmans, go forth and search the four worlds and the farthest cities for Nala and Damayanti ; who so succeedeth and bringeth here my daughter and her husband shall receive a thousand kine, broad fields and the tribute of a town. Failing that, he who bringeth word of their whereabouts shall receive the wealth of a thousand kine ! "

Those holy Brahmans set out, searching in all the cities, the provinces and far states. For long months they wandered, but nowhere found they any trace of Nala and his spouse. Day after day the watchmen upon the turrets of Kundina scanned the roads and mountain-passes for some white-robed Brahman returning with the long-awaited news, since not one of that noble caste would return unless with tidings, but would travel on and on, for ever seeking the lost pair.

One of their number, named Sudeva, reached at length

the beautiful city of the Chedis. It was the time when Suvahu, the wise king of that city, was performing the ritual of the evening and was deep in prayer. Sudeva espied the king's daughter, Sunanda, seated within the palace, and beside her was the form, faintly familiar, of a large-eyed lady, worn, emaciated, wan with sorrow, whose incomparable beauty shone forth like a fire seen fitfully through shrouds of smoke. Then thought Sudeva to himself: "Surely that is Damayanti, for through that mask of melancholy I seem to see the girl whom once I knew." A prayer of thanksgiving burst from his lips and he murmured:

"O blessed am I, for my eyes have seen the one who like fair Shri herself delighteth the three worlds. Her youth unchanging the full moon resembleth, her splendour illumineth all. Whose eyes make even Rati envious; whose breasts, as they were moons, would make men mad that gazed on them. But now she lieth, a bruised stalk of the lotus uprooted from her native lake, bespattered with the mud of existence. Misfortunate and melancholy, she looketh like night when Rahu hath swallowed the moon; or the grooved bed of a stream

whose springs have dried. Her heart is rent and ravaged as the blue surface of a lotus lake is churned by the plunging of elephants, so that its swans and water-fowls are affrighted. Verily she of the fragile frame, of the lovely limbs, who deserveth to dwell in a mansion decked with gems, is now an uprooted lotus stalk scorched by the glare of the sun. I behold her there without ornaments, who is most worthy of them; she looketh like the moon new-bent in heaven, but veiled by the blackest clouds. I behold her there without comfort, away from her loved ones and friends; in exile, unknown, she liveth by the hope of beholding her lord. Truly it is said the best adornment of woman is a husband, however wanting in ornament herself. For here this lovely lady, without her spouse, shineth not. Doth Nala live separated from such a wife? Doth he not sicken in grief? How my heart grieveth when it seeth this girl of the ebon hair, the jet-dark eyes, wasting in woe, who should flower in bliss! How long shall her slender waist by no lover's arm be encircled? O, when shall this damsel, having crossed the ocean of woe, regain the company of her lord?"

Having uttered these pious reflections, Sudeva thought with what pleasure he would console the lost princess by the tidings he bore of her father and her children, Indrasen and Indrasena. Later he approached Damayanti, who, recognising him, at once ran across the court to meet him; she burst into tears at the sight of one who reminded her of all her dear ones in far Kundina. Eagerly she asked for news of her children, her father and mother and her brothers; she sobbed aloud when Sudeva told her how well, how much grown were her son and daughter. And then the kind sage comforted her, saying that hundreds of Brahmans were ranging the wide world in search of Nala, and therefore, he hoped, before many moons had passed she would be happy in reunion with her lord.

While the sage and Damayanti were thus conversing, Sunanda, who had loitered beneath the colonnade on the far side of the court, saw her companion and playmate weeping bitterly in the presence of a strange Brahman. Greatly surprised by this, she watched them for a moment from the shadow of a painted arch, and then ran through the halls and corridors of the palace, across the court-

yard and the cloistered hanging-garden, to the apartments of the old queen. Bursting in upon her mother, who was perfuming her hair and robing herself for the night, she said breathlessly: "Sairindhri is weeping bitterly and talking earnestly with a Brahman. Come now and see for yourself." Drawn by the excitement of her daughter, the queen-mother left the inner apartments and, followed by her waiting-women, issued forth into the outer court. At her approach the wise Sudeva bowed down in salutation, and did not rise until called by the queen, who straightway asked him: "Who is this fair one? How hath she fallen into such a plight? Come, enter in and tell me all thou knowest of this damsel of celestial beauty."

Thereupon the queen-mother passed beneath the rich hangings, that were held apart by young slaves, into the high-vaulted, pillared pavilion whose walls were adorned with bright-coloured paintings of the gods in their heavenly cities. She seated herself upon a couch covered with purple cloth and bade her daughter and Sairindhri stand behind her. When the waiting-women had arranged the jewelled cushions for her comfort, she

begged Sudeva to be seated and to relate the true history of the beautiful stranger.

"This blessed lady," said Sudeva, pointing at Sairindhri, "is the daughter of king Bhima; her name is Damayanti, and she is the wife of Nala, the king of the Nishadas. That noble king was defeated at dice by his brother, losing thereby his kingdom and all his wealth. On that same day he disappeared, unknown to anyone, and was followed by the faithful Damayanti. Since then they have been lost and mourned by all, until king Bhima gave orders that hundreds of Brahmans should wander over the whole earth in search of them. And now Damayanti, at last, is found in the palace of thy son. She who is Sairindhri to thy fair Sunanda is none other than our lost Damayanti. Of this I am certain, for her beauty is unrivalled, and moreover I can discern, beneath her drooping locks, like a moon hid in clouds, the soft mole resembling a lotus-bud, that is planted between her eyebrows. It was placed there at her birth by the creator himself, as a mark of royalty and wealth. Although she is unadorned and her body has been neglected, yet her beauty is manifest and shineth

like gold. Thus by her beauty and god-given mole I have found her, as a ruby by its colour is found in the rock."

When Sunanda heard this story from Sudeva, she grew very excited, and running towards her, lifted the concealing tresses from Damayanti's brow. And there was the mole made visible, like the crescent moon, emerging from billowy clouds. Then, seeing that mark of royalty, Sunanda and her mother wept for joy, embracing the lost Damayanti with affection, who meanwhile stood silent and embarrassed.

"O beauteous girl," said the old queen, "thy mother and I are both daughters of high-souled Sudaman, the ruler of the Dasarnas. I was with thy mother when thou wast born in our father's palace. O beauteous one, my house is as much thine as is thy father's; thou shalt be honoured and treated like a daughter."

"I have lived so happily with thee," said Damayanti, overflowing with gladness and bowing down to her aunt, "although unrecognised and unknown thou hast cared for me, and satisfied every want, therefore I do not wish to break the bonds of this sweet servitude.

Happy as my stay has been, I doubt not that I would be happier still if I remained. But I have been so long in exile, O allow me now to go to my home, my father's palace, to see my children, who for so long have been deprived of father and mother. If thou wouldst be kind to me, order preparations to be made that I may travel without delay to the country of the Vidarbhas."

"As thou desirest, my dear child," answered the queen-mother, "so shall it be."

That same night, when the king of the Chedis had returned from hunting and had been informed of all that had taken place, he was delighted, and gave orders that a great feast be prepared, and musicians and dancers be summoned. So at the second hour of the night, after the king had sacrified to Varuna and bowed to the four quarters of the heavens, while grey-bearded Brahmans intoned the liturgies of the Veda, torches were placed along the causeway and hundreds of lamps lit in the great hall of the palace. Damayanti, who had bathed in a rock-hewn pool through which a natural spring eddied, was now arrayed in the white folds of a royal gown, strewn with a pattern of flower-like stars, wrought in

gold. Her hair was fragrant from the anointing with oil of sesame and jasmine scent; her finger-nails shone like coral beads, and around her throat she wore a gift from the queen-mother, a necklace of moonstones, hung in nets of silver thread, looking like great drops of water from Kama's heavenly lake. By her side were the queen-mother and Sunanda, who clapped her bracelet-tinkling hands to show what pleasure she derived from this great occasion, for she had truly loved her gentle companion, secretly envying her romantic life. But Damayanti, once more shining with her inimitable beauty, her eyes sparkling with the excitement of the moment, could not entirely suppress the wan smile, the sad droop of her collyrium-tinted eyelids that betokened the wandering of her mind still through jungle and desert, over mountain and marsh, seeking ever faithfully for her Nala. Around the royal couches stood the body-guard of archers, as motionless as the tall pillars of the central aisle. Their fine mail glittered in the flickering lamplight like jackets of silver sequins, and now and again a gush of red, a stab of blue, showed where a ruby or lapis lazuli studded the quiver-clasps and the sword hilts.

The long lines of guests, seated upon mats, were passing the time before the king's appearance in singing love chants and snatches from the Vedas. Presently the blare of trumpets and conches, the rumble of drums, announced the approach of the monarch. He strode in with the chowrie-bearers following behind. The whole concourse saluted him, and after he had pronounced a prayer and was seated under the scarlet awning of his throne, hundreds of servants busied themselves with the service. Dishes of burnished copper, plates of sewn banana leaves, were handed round, and the guests helped themselves to the delicacies of the repast.

Meanwhile musicians in a shadowy torch-lit corner kept up a perpetual monotone of sound; the soft pulsing of the metal-stringed *vina* mingled with the deep chords of the accompanying *tambura*, while a muffled drum gave a rhythmic beat, a kind of gasping throb, to the queer melody of sound. The feast went on, a riotous eating, for the warriors of the party were soon inflamed with draughts of soma juice that circulated in carved vessels of *udumbara* wood. Then damsels with tinkling ankle-bells and lithe forms, like grasses swaying in the

breeze, danced to the mad rhythms of the music. The torches burnt low, and the night advanced, until presently the queen-mother, Damayanti and Sunanda, who showed her little buds of teeth in peals of laughter, left the feast and retired to rest. Long after that, they heard the singing of the men, the distant thrumming of the instruments.

All that night Damayanti did not sleep; arising at the first flush of daybreak, she went out to bathe in the quiet pool under the palm-grove in the gardens. By the time she had reached its flower-dotted margin, the burning disc of the sun had soared into the sky and burst into flaming radiancy. She surprised a peacock drinking there; her approach frightened a green-throated duck into flight, which with neck outstretched and paddles trailing, showing a dazzling splendour of outspread wing, shot up from the still surface, so that the palm-tree images shivered and rocked, and the bright mirror crinkled in a thousand intersecting ripples. With a bank of pampas-grass for screen, she disrobed and plunged into the pool. When she stood up and put her hands to her hair, the water just lapping at the curve of her breasts, she looked in

her slender grace like a solitary water-lily opening its petals to the sun.

Returning to her chamber, her ablutions now performed, she found her waiting-woman, who, after rubbing her all over with saffron, robed her in a gorgeous purple-corded garment smelling of nard, which all night had hung upon a tree and received the blessing of Brahmans. Following that, she devoted herself to her morning prayers, sprinkling water to Agni with face turned towards the sun. Sunanda and her mother entered, and together with them Damayanti went out into the courtyard, where preparations for her journey were being made. They were to set forth about the hour of sunset. The first thing her eyes rested upon was the gorgeous palanquin, which stood on the ground beside the fountain. It was made of carved juniper-wood decorated with gilded bulls' heads and jewel-studded lotus-blooms. Fine blue curtains hung around it, and soft cushions and rugs of dyed antelope lay upon the couch. Standing beside it were six stalwart bearers who were testing the carrying-poles and leathers. Behind were fifty porters adjusting the thongs of their bales, which held the food and drink

of the party and rich clothing for the princess. All day the palace was in a fever of bustle and excitement, servants hastened with messages through the halls and corridors, coffers were carried out into the courtyard. And when evening came, the escort of a hundred archers, under the command of the king's most trusted officer, had gathered at the palace gate. Upon the turrets trumpeters were waiting to honour the departing Damayanti with royal notes. The queen and Sunanda embraced their beautiful kinswoman, who had dwelt with them as a stranger and from whom they were loth to part so soon; the king of the Chedis saluted her and called upon the gods to protect her on her journey.

Then, with tears in her eyes, amidst the salutations of the soldiers, Damayanti stepped into the golden palanquin. The six giants bent to the white poles and tooled leathers, and swinging the litter on to their shoulders, with slow, majestic strides marched towards the gates which had now been opened, while fanfares of trumpets rang out from the turrets on the palace walls. Archers marched beside the litter and at the head of the procession, which, moving at a brisk pace, was soon clear of the palace

precincts. Damayanti looked through the draped folds of the curtains and saw, standing upon that same terrace whereon she had first espied her, the queen-mother and her daughter Sunanda. And the girl was weeping in her mother's arms, as she waved farewell to her beloved Sairindhri. They swung past the bazaars, through the crowds of citizens, soon reaching the moated ramparts of the city; then, crossing the causeway, they commenced the descent of the eastern hills on the long journey to Kundina.

## CHAPTER VII

FTER many days of weary travelling the escort of Damayanti was one morning met by outriders from Kundina, for the watchers who for months had kept ceaseless vigil on the ramparts had espied them in the far distance. A young horseman sped with the news back to the city and soon the tidings were joyfully proclaimed by everyone: "The princess Damayanti returns; the king's daughter is found." One of the royal chariots was sent to meet the party and to bring the princess and the holy Brahman Sudeva with utmost speed to the palace. A few *yojanas* from the city walls the car met the travellers, and soon, having descended from her palanquin and seated herself beside the charioteer, Damayanti was racing down the wide road towards the northern gate of her father's city. There crowds of citizens received her with great rejoicings, and all along the broad avenue to the palace weeping and singing

throngs made her welcome. In the palace courtyard she was greeted by her father king Bhima and her three brothers, who embraced her lovingly, shedding tears of joy over her. Then with all respect she was conducted to the private apartments of the women, where she found her mother and her hand-maidens weeping and laughing with delight to behold once more their beautiful princess. She greeted them all tenderly, then inquired where were her children Indrasen and Indrasena. Immediately the smiling, pretty babes were brought in from an adjacent room, and then Damayanti's heart overflowed with joy; such bliss it was to clasp in her arms those dear ones from whom she had parted, seemingly so many years ago.

The king spent long hours that day in prayers and thanksgiving, performing the most elaborate ritual of sacrifices to the gods, who at last had favoured the return of his lost daughter. To Sudeva, the venerable Brahman who had discovered the exiled princess, he gave, as he had promised, a thousand kine, much wealth of gold and silver, and the tribute annually of a whole village.

All that night, within the rose-coloured pyramids of the temple, the songs and music of the priests went on; Damayanti could hear it like a muffled throbbing, as she lay down to rest after her long journey. But in her sleep she could see lord Nala, lost in a dense forest, towards whom she was struggling through clinging creepers and coarse branches that lashed her naked limbs. So in the morning, although recovered from fatigue, she was unhappy, moodily downcast; and the queen, her mother, entering her chamber to greet her and accompany her to the rock-pools for bathing, observed her wan countenance, her tearful, unhappy eyes. She asked her daughter what could ail her on this day, that was to be a festival in her honour for the whole city.

Damayanti sobbed in her mother's arms. "O mother, if thou wouldst see me live," she said, "thou must bring my Nala to me, for I cannot pass a single day, nor rest a single night, without thinking of him, longing for that hero among men. O mother, surely there is news of him; will he not soon be here?"

But the queen could not answer; she was silent and

sorrowful; how could she tell Damayanti what many thought by now—that Nala had perished in the forest through hunger, or wild beasts, or in some fierce conflagration? She burst into tears and left the apartment with her waiting-women. Then for many hours the mourning rooms in the far corner of the palace were filled with lamentations, for when the queen sorrowed all the women of the palace wept too.

She determined at last to go to her husband and tell him all, for she could not bear to think of it alone, and was bewildered with the darkness of grief. She found the king in his retiring-room, where he was resting from the heat of noon, fanned incessantly with dyed chowries, which were swept backwards and forwards by tall slaves. "O my husband," she said, "thy daughter Damayanti mourneth on account of Nala. She hath herself, overcoming all bashfulness, declared her heart to me. She cannot live happily, nor rest dreamlessly, without her beloved Nala. Oh, let thy men use every means to discover him, range every land in search of him."

The king, who but yesterday had been overjoyed at his daughter's homecoming, was now plunged into

distress and anxiety. Accordingly he summoned certain wise Brahmans to attend his audience at the fourth hour of that day. Until that hour arrived his brow was wrinkled in perplexity and worried sighs escaped him. The deep gong aroused him to his sense of duty, and he walked towards the council-hall. The holy Brahmans were assembled, a white-robed, majestic gathering, standing in long lines amidst the thick, mast-like pillars of the marble hall. These pillars were golden, decorated with neat designs of forest blooms worked in stones of different colours. The doors that opened on big echoing corridors were of teak inlaid with ebony and ivory, and furnished with locks of white silver that could be opened only by artifice without a key. Upheld by the forest of columns, whose capitals were carved groups of lions or elephants, was the ponderous roof of beaten copper that rose in the centre to a dome of black onyx, whereon was carved a frieze of monsters with such boldness, in high relief, that it seemed as if at any moment they might spring to the ground.

As the king entered and took his seat under the canopy of the carved green throne, set upon a low slab

of white porphyry, the whole concourse bowed down in reverence. Then he signed to them to be seated and began explaining the sad plight of his daughter, stirring them to wonderful pity and solicitude; and finally he exhorted them to exert tremendous energy in the search for Nala. King Bhima then called his daughter to him, so that they should all see her drawn features, the withering lotus of her countenance, and by that be urged to unending endeavour. And Damayanti, when she had been told the reason for this assembly, addressed the Brahmans with great earnestness, saying: "O holy men, ye shall chant in every realm, in every assembly of men, even to the smallest, these words:

> 'Beloved gambler, why didst thou go away
> After removing half of my garment?
> Why didst thou leave, as she slept in the forest,
> Thy dear wife, so devoted to thee?
> Yet she stayeth, as thou hast commanded,
> Clothed in but half a robe, expecting thee
> And burning with grief!'

"This shall ye say again and again, so that he shall be consumed by a fire of remorse as the forest is destroyed in a fire fanned by wind. Then ye must say:

'Is not the wife to be cared for and sheltered?
Why hast thou, so honourable, knowing thy duty,
Neglected thy vows?
Master of wisdom, of fame, why art thou cruel?
Alas, that my own ill-luck should cause all this!
O tiger among men, have pity on me!
Oft have I heard thee voice the rule
That kindness the highest virtue is.'

"Then, if anyone answers you, ye shall seek him out and, knowing him, learn who he is and where he dwelleth, and, whatever answer he giveth ye shall bring back to me. Furthermore, great care must be taken lest anyone know that the words ye utter are from me, or that ye will return to me. But remember, discover whether he that answereth is wealthy or poor, whether he is mighty or destitute of power; I beseech you, learn all about him."

And the Brahmans muttered their promises, a deep-voiced chorus, and, after chanting a prayer, filed out of the council chamber.

Within a few hours the bells of the temple pyramids began to toll, and sacred horns were blown from the high terraces of the sanctuary, while within the dark naves, to the accompaniment of music and singing, hundreds of holy men sacrificed to Brahma and Agni

before setting out from Kundina. The religious ordinances were kept up far into the night, allowing but a few hours for sleep, before the sun lit up the rose-tinted turrets of the city, and warmth drove the bluish-white banks of mists away. Then at the four main gates of the city were groups of Brahmans waiting for the guard to roll back the towering portals at the first hour of the day.

A herald from the ramparts of the palace trumpeted the signal, and the great gates opened upon the undulating plain stretching to the four quarters of the sky. The wise Brahmans stepped forth into the limitless spaces of the earth to look for Nala; they marched on briskly, each carrying only a tall staff and a gourd. Far and wide they went searching for him amongst the mountains of the north, the deserts of the south, and the dense jungles of the east and west. They searched for him in cities, in distant villages and remote refuges of ascetics, even in places inhabited only by cow-herds, and everywhere they recited the pleading words of Damayanti.

For a long time no news filtered through to Kundina; a mood of despair settled upon the dwellers in the palace; into the princess's eyes an unnatural light had crept; she

had grown thin and pale through ceaseless pining. Until one day a horseman brought word to the king's daughter that a Brahman, by name Parnada, was at the city gates, and had stated that he had news for the princess. Damayanti ordered him to be conducted to a certain secluded terrace in the gardens, where she would await him, for she wished to hear the first message from her lost Nala alone. In a little while Parnada appeared, having bathed and rested after his long journey. He saluted the princess and said:

"O Damayanti, in seeking for the king of Nishada I wandered to the city of Ayodhya and entered the court of Rituparna. There I recited those words of thine, but neither that ruler nor his courtiers paid any heed, although I uttered them repeatedly. At last the king thought I was mocking him with some obscure riddle and dismissed me from the court. I had left the palace and was crossing the outer courtyard when I was accosted by the king's charioteer, named Vahuka. This man is an exceedingly ugly dwarf, but he is a skilful and intrepid driver, and is well acquainted, moreover, with the subtleties of the art of cooking. He appeared to be in great

distress, sighing frequently and bursting into tears again and again. He inquired of my welfare, whence I had travelled and why I had recited those words. I said it was a message that only one man would fully understand, and thereupon he answered these words :

'Chaste women in distress themselves protect,
Securing heaven thereby; though lords elect
May leave them, they are not by wrath debased.
For women chaste lead slender lives encased
In shining virtue, like resplendent mail.
With one so unlucky, whose only cloth
Was stolen by those birds, of what avail
Can anger be? She must not cherish wrath
Against her husband in such piteous plight,
Who lost all he had in a single night.'

"When he had said that he turned away with a sigh and went towards the palace stables. I had already been acquainted with all his circumstances, therefore I memorised his words and set out that same evening for Kundina. Now thou hast heard all. Canst thou find significance in the dwarf's words?"

Damayanti wondered in her heart what this could mean, coming from a man so unsightly; she begged

Parnada to take rest and refreshment while she went to inform the king of his return. But this she did not do; instead she crept quietly into the private apartments of her mother, where, with tearful eyes, she told her all. And they discussed with one another the puzzle, that here certainly was the voice of Nala, yet the charioteer of Rituparna resembled in no respect the king of Nishada. They debated long by what means this mysterious Vahuka could be brought to Kundina, and how they would be certain that he was indeed Nala. Eventually Damayanti hit upon a plan; she thought that if Rituparna could be told that she was about to hold another *Svayamvara*, believing Nala dead, then he would most certainly come, and as a matter of course bring his chief charioteer Vahuka with him. She said to her mother: "But my father, the king, must not know of this. O mother, if thou desirest my welfare, act so that the king may not hear of my intention. I will send for Sudeva, that foremost of Brahmans, now, and in thy presence I will order him to set out without delay for the city of Ayodhya; for it was by his subtlety that I was discovered and brought back speedily to my royal home."

Eager to put her idea into action, the princess hurried out to where Parnada was resting and thanked him profusely for all he had done, saying: "When Nala returneth here, O Brahman, I will bestow on thee wealth in abundance. Thou hast done for me what no one else can do; through thee I shall regain my lost lord." And the high-souled Parnada comforted her, blessed her, and went his way, regarding his mission as successful.

When he had gone, Damayanti sent a messenger to summon Sudeva, and waited restlessly and agitatedly for his arrival. When that venerable Brahman at last appeared in the presence of the queen and her daughter, he was surprised at the earnestness with which Damayanti addressed him.

"O Sudeva," she said, "go thou to Ayodhya as fast as thy feet can carry thee, and as straight as the crow flies, and tell king Rituparna, who rules there, that Bhima's daughter Damayanti will hold another *Svayamvara*, that all the kings and princes are coming hither for it, that there is no time to lose; for, calculating the date from the day on which you left Kundina, the ceremony will be held to-morrow. Urge that repressor of foes to come

hither without delay, for on the morrow, after the sun hath risen, I will choose a second husband, since I know not whether heroic Nala liveth or not."

And so that same night, according to the queen's instructions, Sudeva departed from the sleeping rose-tinted city by a small postern gate in the northern wall. He rested part of the night in a travellers' shelter at the foot of the hills, and, rising again before dawn, set out with all speed for the city of Ayodhya.

## CHAPTER VIII

IN due course the faithful Sudeva arrived at the court of Rituparna and was ushered with customary formality and respect into the king's presence. The monarch of Ayodhya was enjoying a game of dice, which he played with consummate skill, with several captains of the guard and his favourite charioteers. Two of the players started in surprise when the messenger from Kundina was announced, but the mighty son of Bhangasura threw his dice before attending to the stranger. Then, settling himself back upon the embroidered couch on which he reclined at ease, the king ordered Sudeva to deliver his message.

After saluting the king in reverence the holy Brahman told all that Damayanti had directed him to say; he declared that by now the preparations for the *Svayamvara* would be almost complete, and added, calculating care-

fully, that on the next day after sunrise the princess of Kundina would choose a second husband.

Rituparna received this announcement with great excitement and satisfaction. He turned to Vahuka, his dwarf charioteer, saying enthusiastically: "Thou art exceedingly skilled at training and driving horses, O Vahuka. Now is the chance to show thy prowess; thou shalt drive me to Damayanti's *Svayamvara* in a single day!"

The ugly Vahuka bowed obediently, but in his heart, that was still the heart of Nala, there was the bitter agony of sorrow. Grief pierced him like a sword; he thought that perhaps Damayanti was doing this out of desperation; yet, on the other hand, that she might have conceived this magnificent plan for his sake, as she had done before. "But in this world," he said to himself, "it is manifest everywhere that woman's nature is inconstant. But my offence was great, and perhaps she is acting thus because she no longer loves me. Perhaps her love for me has died through our long separation. Yet my slender, graceful wife, who is sorrowing for me, will certainly not do that. Is she not the mother of my children?

Whether this report be true or false, I shall find out by going thither myself, and thus serve Rituparna and my own ends too."

Being thus resolved, yet unhappy of heart, Vahuka saluted the king and returned to the royal stables to select horses for the journey. The king of Kosala made hasty preparations, calling for his travelling cloak of purple wool and for a casket of jewels to be presented to Damayanti; he hurried the captain who was buckling the sword about the royal waist, and sent slaves to urge Vahuka to expedite the selection of the horses.

In the stables the chief charioteer with mournful eye scrutinised each animal in the long line of horses, examining their foreheads, their fetlocks, their hoofs. After careful deliberation he selected four highly bred steeds that were lean-fleshed, yet strong and capable of great energy. He saw that they were free from all inauspicious marks, such as having ten curls of hair upon the forehead, that each had wide nostrils and swelling cheeks, and, although sensitive, was very docile. And, remembering that they were born in the country of Sindhu, he knew they were as fleet as the winds.

Vahuka led the horses forth into the yard and began to harness them to the towering chariot of the king. While he was thus employed, deafened by the clatter of hoofs, the clanging of golden chains and heavy leathers and the creaking of gigantic wheels, Rituparna hurried into the yard, ready now to mount the car. But when he saw the high-backed, lean horses which Vahuka had selected, he frowned with annoyance, exclaiming:

"What meanest thou by this, Vahuka? This is no time for jesting. How can these horses carry us a thousand *yojanas* in a single day?"

The charioteer replied: "Each of these horses, O master, bears twelve curls—one on his forehead, one on each of his temples, four on his sides, four on his chest, and one on the crest of his back. Therefore I say that I am sure these steeds will carry us to the land of Vidarbha. But if, O king, thou wouldst rather choose some others, point them out to me, and I will yoke them for thee." At that the king was satisfied. "I am not well versed in the science of horses as thou art, Vahuka. Yoke thou the best, but speedily."

Therefore Vahuka soon harnessed those four glossy

steeds to the carven car, and all was in readiness for the journey. Gathering the reins in his hands he made the horses fall on their knees, and bowed low himself as the mighty king of Kosala mounted his car. Then, springing up into his place, with Varshneya stationed behind him, Vahuka raised up the horses by a skilful flick of the reins and faced them round for the start. The horses were fretting, straining at the reins, and Vahuka soothed them with magical, liquid words. When all was ready he urged them forward by sharp cries and a rhythmic sweep of the reins, out from the palace precincts and down the broad street, towards the Gate of the Sun. The wheels rattled and roared over the wooden paving of the road, gathering speed as the horses raced towards the towering eastern portals. The sentinels upon the turrets saw them pass through with the noise and rapidity of a hurricane hurling down a ravine. Then, to the astonishment of all who beheld it, the car rose from the level plain and soared higher and higher into the air, until it seemed a ball of fire rushing towards the face of the sun.

King Rituparna was amazed at the incredible speed

of those slim horses, and wondered greatly at the power that could make them ride the wide spaces of the sky as fleet as the very winds. Varshneya was struck by the remarkable skill with which Vahuka guided the steeds and urged them on to the utmost, and from his station just behind him, watching his inspired handling of the reins, he reflected that here was mastery worthy of keen-eyed Matali, the charioteer of the gods. Yet, he mused, how came Vahuka by such magnificent powers? Had Salihotra, the master of the equestrian lore, taken upon himself this form so ugly? But perhaps Vahuka had acquired his knowledge and skill from king Nala, for indeed it seemed that no other man but Nala could equal him. Furthermore, he remembered that Vahuka and Nala were of the same age. If this was not the powerful, heroic Nala, then he must be somebody of equal knowledge. "Illustrious persons often walk the earth in disguise in consequence of great misfortune, or to obey the dictates of the Shastras. Therefore this unsightly person might well be king Nala despoiled of his matchless beauty. In years they are the same and equal in accomplishment; only in personal appearance do

they differ. I feel sure he is king Nala." Thus Varshneya reasoned to himself as he watched the consummate skill of the dwarf charioteer, while Rituparna was delighted and a little envious of the cunning with which Vahuka held the reins, observing admiringly the concentration and ardour which urged him at superhuman speed towards the far city of Kundina.

On and on went the car, coursing through the air like a gigantic condor sweeping from summit to summit. Over peaks and valleys, rivers and piled mountains, over endless green waves of forest swiftly they passed. Wide lakes appeared as small as rock-pools and were like uncut crystals set upon the bosom of the mountains. Gorges and long ravines were mere scratches upon the vast plan of the earth, and far away a white line showed where mighty falls rolled noiselessly, ceaselessly in a bank of foam. Cities and villages, white flecks carelessly daubed here and there upon the prevailing ocean of green, were passed by and out of sight in an instant.

On they went at tempestuous speed, the wind singing and shrieking about them; their hair and garments blown backwards, the latter billowing out like great sails,

the manes of the horses bent before the rushing air. When they had thus covered more than a quarter of the way, the king's cloak was torn from his shoulders by the fierce wind, and dropped to earth far behind. Rituparna was extremely agitated at such a loss and immediately desired Vahuka to rein in the horses, to descend, so that Varshneya could recover the garment. But Vahuka replied: "Thy robe is far behind, O king. We have already travelled one *yojana* from it. Therefore it cannot be recovered unless we turn back."

And the royal son of Bhangasura was unable to remonstrate. But not long after he saw in the forest over which they were passing a beautiful Vibkitaka tree laden with fruits. And turning to the charioteer suddenly, he shouted, though almost bereft of breath by the force of the wind: "A man cannot know everything, cannot compass the whole continent of knowledge, O Vahuka. Thou showest thy excellence in the science of horses, now I will show thee my high proficiency in calculation. Seest thou yonder tree? The leaves and fruits of that tree which lie scattered on the ground beneath it exceed those that remain on it respectively

by one hundred and one. The branches of the tree have fifty million leaves and two thousand and ninety-five fruits. Do thou examine them for thyself and pronounce me right."

Vahuka thereupon stayed the car, replying: "O crusher of foes, thine is a speculation beyond my perception. But I will prove it through the direct evidence of my senses. I will cut down the Vibkitaka tree and in thy presence count the fruits and leaves. Meanwhile Varshneya shall hold the reins." The king had not anticipated a challenge of that sort and urged Vahuka not to tarry, since there was no time to lose. However, the charioteer answered humbly yet firmly: "Let us halt a little while, or, if thou art in so much hurry, take Varshneya as thy charioteer and go on. The road lies hence straight and even."

Rituparna became apprehensive of not reaching Kundina in time for the *Svayamvara*; he sought to soothe Vahuka with conciliatory words. "Thou art the foremost charioteer," he said; "there is none other like thee in the world, for thou art second only to Matali, who drives the chariot of the king of heaven. It is

through thy profound horse-lore and thy help that I hope to reach Vidarbha before the dawn. I am in thy hands, O Vahuka. Do not stand in the way of my desire. Any wish thou hast I will grant, if to-morrow I see the sun rise over red Kundina."

To this Vahuka answered: "Not until I have counted the fruits and leaves of this tree will I continue the journey to Vidarbha."

"Well, then, count them," agreed the king reluctantly. "Thou wilt see as soon as thou hast counted part of this branch that I was right."

Vahuka jumped down from the car and with lusty strokes of his sword felled the tree. After much counting he was struck with amazement that what the king had said was correct. "Thy power is wonderful, O monarch. I wish thou wouldst teach me to know all this." And the king, whose heart was set on winning the fair princess, and therefore most intent on resuming the journey speedily, replied: "By a knowledge of dice I have become proficient in numbers."

When Vahuka heard this he begged the king to impart all he knew about dice in return for his own

great knowledge of horses. And Rituparna, bearing in mind the importance of preserving his charioteer's good will if Damayanti's *Svayamvara* was to be reached in time, and also his long-cherished wish to possess the science of horses, agreed to it.

"So be it, then," said Rituparna; "I will reveal to thee all the secrets of dicing, but thou must reserve for me the equine mysteries until a more favourable time."

The royal promise having been made, and, moreover, anxious to resume the journey, Rituparna immediately began to instruct Vahuka in the most intricate problems of dicing.

As the secret wisdom entered his mind to be stored for ever in his memory, Vahuka seemed to be overcome by a trance, his face became fixed and pale, his body rigid, so that his dwarfish figure appeared even more hideous in this convulsion. But his heart, which after all was the heart of Nala, was rent by a tempestuous upheaval; it beat and throbbed wildly as though at any moment it would burst the imprisoning bosom. At last the evil Kali who had long afflicted the body of king Nala was driven out, and as he emerged he vomited

incessantly in green and scarlet streams the burning poison of Karkotaka. Thus as Kali, imprisoned by Damayanti's curse, came out of the king's body, so the fire of the Naga's bite also left the treacherous spirit of gambling. Immediately Nala had recovered from his disruption he was filled with wrath and began cursing Kali, but the spirit, frightened and trembling, with supplicating hands, begged him to control his anger, saying: "I will make thee illustrious, O king. Indrasena's mother cursed me in anger when thou didst desert her. And ever since, residing in thee, I have suffered, burning night and day with the venom of the prince of snakes. Do not curse me, O mighty king, I am afraid and seek thy protection. If thou showest mercy to me now, whosoever shall recite thy history shall have no fear of me."

And so king Nala, earnestly beseeched by Kali in this manner, controlled his wrath, and thereupon the frightened spirit entered at once into the Vibkitaka tree. But all the while this conversation was going on Kali was invisible to the others, who did not notice anything untoward. Yet from that day, through the touch of

Kali, the Vibkitaka tree lost all its beauty, and its fruits became uneatable.

Now Nala, freed from his afflictions and calamities, was filled with great joy and boundless energy. He mounted the car again, and urged the fiery-footed steeds onward, so that they sprang into the air as before, like creatures endowed with wings. He drove at a furious pace towards Vidarbha, so that Rituparna and Varshneya were amazed, marvelling greatly that the dwarf Vahuka should possess equestrian skill that would not shame the celestial Matali. Onwards for hundreds upon hundreds of *yojanas* they sped, now throwing a shadow as of a huge eagle upon the green slopes of the hills, now riding across wide savannahs of white clouds which curtained the face of the earth far below. On and on until they could see in the dim distance, delicately outlined against the horizon, the turrets and domes of the rose-red city of Kundina.

## CHAPTER IX

THE sun was already low in the west and throwing his slant-beams upon the sky-going chariot, so that it seemed enveloped by a mauve and crimson aureole, when far below Varshneya saw the rich and fertile plain that lay about Kundina. The long shadows of the palm-groves stretched across the green fields of wheat; the pink flush of the low clouds was reflected and redoubled by the walls and roofs of Kundina to a deep tint of rose.

Looking down from his car, Rituparna was amazed at the wondrous beauty of Bhima's city. At that hour, when all the colours of sunlight are spilt on the sky, and milk-white clouds are born miraculously from the cooling air, swathing as with lace the pyramids and turrets of the city, lightly veiling the deep-green fields, it seemed to him from that great height a gigantic ruby set in a clasp of emerald and

pearl, as though it was a jewelled diadem crowning the earth.

Vahuka now called some mysterious words to the horses and the chariot began to descend towards the broad highway that ran by the river. With infinite grace and skill he brought the carven car to the road once more, but did not diminish in any degree the speed of the horses. They soon traversed the wide, even expanse of the plain, approaching well before the fall of night the western gate of Kundina. The watchers on the turrets there vowed they had seen a chariot of fire descend from the fiery rim of the sun, but vanish from sight as it touched the earth. Then, as the distant rumble of Rituparna's car grew louder, many of them were afraid, believing it to be the approach of Indra upon some dreadful expedition of revenge. The roar, that increased speedily to a deafening crescendo, roused at last the captain of the guard, who swore the noise was like the thunder of all the heavens sounding at once. But when he perceived the magnificent chariot making with incredible swiftness towards the city, he ordered the gates to be flung open and stationed archers and trumpeters upon the ramparts.

Vahuka drew up outside the walls, and the captain of the western watch went out to examine the strangers. When he understood who they were, he sent runners to the palace bearing the tidings. In a little while a royal herald appeared at the gate, bidding Rituparna enter Kundina as a guest of the king.

So with a rattle and lumbering of the car that filled all the points of the horizon Nala drove once more into the city of his kinsman. And the steeds of Nala that were still in the palace stables, hearing the familiar rumble, became excited, neighing and champing in their stalls, tossing their manes in sheer delight.

Damayanti, resting at that time upon a balcony, also heard the noise of the chariot; she thought it was like the deep roar of the clouds in the rainy season. And she wondered greatly over that tremendous sound, for it was like the clatter of Nala's car, in the days of yore when he used to drive his own steeds. King Bhima, walking with his councillors in the private gardens, also heard it and thought at once of Nala. The peacocks on the terraces, the elephants in the stables, hearing that sound too, thought it was the roll of thunder, and, facing

the direction of it, began to screech and bellow, filling the evening quietude with excited cries.

Suddenly stirred by the thought that Nala might be near, Damayanti became wrapt in ecstasy. Her weary soul was again possessed by the old fierce longing. She muttered to herself: "Surely king Nala has come, for the rattle of his car that fills the whole universe gladdens my heart. I shall die if I see not Nala soon: my hero of countless virtues whose face is as bright as the moon. How can I live another day and not be clasped in his strong embrace! O, if the lord of Nishada, whose voice is as deep as the clouds, cometh not to me to-day, I shall lay myself down upon a pyre of golden flames. If my noble king, who is as powerful as a lion and endowed with the vigour of an ichor-streaming elephant, does not come to me soon, I shall die. Never spake he an untrue word, even in jest, nor did he any wrong to others. O my exalted Nala, thou art forgiving, heroic and munificent, and mightier than all other kings. I know thou hast been faithful to thy marriage vows and all this time hast loved only me. Night and day how I have dwelt on thee, recounting thy perfections in my dreams! O, if

this be not thee, dear Nala, my heart will break with grief!"

Her agitation thus lent a further wildness to her sorrow. She hurried from the balcony down to the terrace that overlooked the courtyard. There she saw king Rituparna in his majestic car with Varshneya and Vahuka, and her father advancing to welcome him.

Rituparna descended from the chariot and saluted Bhima, by whom he was received with great respect, but when he looked about he was amazed to see no signs of any preparations, no trace of pageantry for the *Svayamvara*. Moreover, the monarch of Kundina was equally surprised and puzzled at this unexpected visit of Rituparna, for he was completely unaware of Damayanti's plan. "Welcome, O Rituparna, but what is the occasion of this thy visit?" Bhima said.

But Rituparna's intelligence was as keen as his prowess was unbaffled, and, seeing there were no other kings or princes in attendance nor any concourse of Brahmans, and not hearing any talk relating to the *Svayamvara*, answered after quick reflection: "I have come hither to pay my respects to thee."

King Bhima stared in astonishment on hearing this; it seemed incredulous that a mighty king should travel a thousand *yojanas* for just that. He said to himself: "To pass over other sovereigns and leave behind him innumerable countries, simply to pay respects to me, cannot be the true reason of his arrival. Such a trifling pretext would not bring him here. But perhaps I shall learn the true reason in the future." And although the king thought thus, he behaved most courteously and hospitably towards Rituparna, begging him to enter and be at ease. Honoured in this manner by good-hearted Bhima, the king of Ayodhya was satisfied, and with delight and thankfulness went through to his appointed quarters, followed by the servants of the royal household who were to serve him. Meanwhile Varshneya and Vahuka had taken the car to the stables and unyoked the horses. Then, as was their nightly duty, they watered the steeds and tended them according to rule.

But Damayanti, greatly bewildered by all she had seen and heard, debated within herself: "Whose was that tremendous car-rattle? It was as loud as Nala's and yet it was not he. Perchance Varshneya has learnt

the art from Nala, and so the rattle of a car driven by him would seem like the charioteering of the king. Or is Rituparna as skilled as Nala, so that the rattle of his car is like my lord's?" And as she reflected thus she observed far off on the other side of the courtyard Vahuka deep in thought, seated upon the side of the chariot.

Then she made up her mind and went into her private chamber, calling for Kesini, one of her hand-maidens. She told Kesini to go at once and discover who was the unsightly, dwarfish charioteer sitting by the car. "Approaching him cautiously and with soft words," said Damayanti, "make thou the usual inquiries of courtesy and learn all particulars truly. For from the feelings of peace in my mind and delight to my heart I believe he is none other than Nala. When thou hast inquired after his welfare, thou shalt speak unto him the words which Parnada spake to him before. Finally, be sure to understand and remember the reply he may make to that."

The hand-maiden went accordingly to the stables and addressed Vahuka modestly in these words: "O foremost of men, thou art welcome. I wish thee happiness. Hear now the words of princess Damayanti. She desireth to

know when ye all set out and with what object ye have come hither."

And Vahuka answered: "The illustrious king of Kosala had heard from a Brahman that Damayanti would hold a second *Svayamvara*. Therefore he came here at once with the help of miraculous steeds as fleet as the winds, and I am his charioteer."

"Whence comes the third among you," further questioned Kesini, "and whose son is he? Moreover, whose son art thou, and how hast thou come to this work?"

Nala replied: "He was the charioteer of virtuous Nala, known to all by the name of Varshneya. After Nala abandoned his kingdom, he took service under Rituparna. By reason of my horse-lore and special skill I was appointed, indeed king Rituparna chose me himself, to be his charioteer and cook."

"Perhaps Varshneya knows where king Nala has gone," continued Kesini, "and, O Vahuka, perhaps he has spoken to thee about his former master?"

But Vahuka answered sadly: "After bringing Nala's children back to Kundina he went away none knew where. He does not know where Nishada is. Nor does

anybody, for in his calamity the king wanders over the world in disguise, despoiled of his nature and beauty. Only Nala's self knoweth where Nala is, and she also who is his second self. Nala does not reveal himself anywhere."

Then Kesini said: "The Brahman who lately has been to Ayodhya used to sing there these words, that should be framed by a woman's lips:

'Beloved gambler, why didst thou go away
After removing half of my garment?
Why didst thou leave, as she slept in the forest,
Thy dear wife, so devoted to thee?
Yet she stayeth, as thou hast commanded,
Clothed in but half a robe, expecting thee
And burning with grief!
Is not the wife to be cared for and sheltered?
Why hast thou, so honourable, knowing thy duty,
Neglected thy vows?
Master of wisdom, of fame, why art thou cruel?
Alas, that my own ill-luck should cause all this!
O tiger among men, have pity on me!
Oft have I heard thee voice the rule
That kindness the highest virtue is.'

"The princess has learned that it was thou who understood those verses and gave a reply to them, and

she wishes to hear again those words which thou didst say."

When Nala heard again that heart-broken song the pain of anguish racked him, and his eyes became filled with tears, but, controlling his burning grief with a great effort, he recited in sobbing accents his responding verses :

"Chaste women in distress themselves protect,
Securing heaven thereby ; though lords elect
May leave them, they are not by wrath debased.
For women chaste lead slender lives encased
In shining virtue like resplendent mail.
With one so unlucky, whose only cloth
Was stolen by those birds, of what avail
Can anger be ? She must not cherish wrath
Against her husband in such piteous plight,
Who lost all he had in a single night."

And when he had said that he could no longer restrain his terrible sorrow, and burst out into torrential weeping. The last glimmers of the short twilight were going out ; the cool of night was descending upon the city. Kesini could hear the champing of the horses in their stalls ; then the ringing of the temple gongs warned her of the hour. Her warm young heart was touched

by the sorrow of Vahuka, and as she went softly back to Damayanti, she turned to look across the yard, observing compassionately the bowed figure of the charioteer shaken with lamenting: and determined to herself not to forget one detail of their conversation, but report faithfully to Damayanti all she had seen and heard.

She found Damayanti resting upon her couch of carved onyx, impatiently waiting her return. When the princess had heard what Kesini had to relate, she was oppressed by immense unhappiness, for she believed now, more than ever before, that the misshapen dwarf was no other than king Nala. All night the princess lay awake, not daring to hope, not knowing what to do, being comforted by the faithful Kesini. She was torn between the certainty of her belief that Nala was near her and the uncertainty and unwillingness to believe that the ugly charioteer was her lost husband.

She felt that she must have greater proof of it, and so to this end instructed Kesini, saying: "To-morrow go to Vahuka again, Kesini, and silently observe his conduct. Whenever he happens to do anything skilful,

observe well how he accomplishes it. And if he should ask thee to go and fetch him water or fire, be not in a hurry to do so, but be thus somewhat of a hindrance to him. Mark everything about his behaviour, and whatever human or superhuman qualities thou seest, come and report to me."

The following morning, therefore, Kesini went forth to the stables and on some pretext loitered about there the whole day. Late in the afternoon she returned again to the princess and began at once to relate all she had seen.

"O royal Damayanti, never have I seen a person with such control over the elements. Whenever he comes to a low passage, he does not stoop, but the walls, as though seeing him approaching, grow higher and he passes through easily. The most narrow and impassable entrances widen at his approach. Then he was preparing his master's food—various sorts of meats, which king Bhima had provided—and he stood in front of a row of vessels which had been placed on the ground for washing those meats, when suddenly he looked upon them and they at once became filled with water. After

he had washed the meat he made ready to cook it, and having plucked a handful of grass he held it up to the sun, and lo! it burst into flame, so that with it he could light the fires.

"I was amazed at this marvel, but it was not long before I observed a greater one. O princess, he touched the fire and yet was not burnt! Then, at his will, falling water from a vessel continued to flow in a stream. Then I witnessed the greatest wonder of all. He took up some flowers and began to press them slowly with his hands, yet the flowers did not lose their original shapes, but, on the contrary, became even gayer and more fragrant than before. After that I hastened back to tell thee of all these wondrous things."

Damayanti recalled the gifts which the four gods had bestowed upon her husband, and thought that of all men only Nala with such powers could have done all that Kesini had witnessed. Again strong but conflicting emotions rent her heart, when from these facts she suspected that Vahuka must be her lost husband. In a weak, sad voice she said to Kesini: "Go thou once more to the kitchen and bring me without Vahuka's

knowledge some meat which he has dressed for the king." And Kesini, only too eager to do anything for her beloved mistress, went to the kitchen and brought back in a little while some freshly cooked meat. Damayanti then tasted the meat, and since she had many a time partaken of meat dressed and cooked by Nala, she knew at once that her lord had prepared it.

Thereupon she decided that Vahuka was indeed her husband and wept aloud in distress of heart, unable to bear the horror of his deformity. Yet still some slight doubt assailed her, and, drying her eyes, she ordered Kesini to take her two children to Vahuka to see if he should recognise them. But when Vahuka, who was the king in disguise, saw Indrasen and Indrasena approaching with Kesini, he ran towards them, seized them in his embrace, and then sat them delightedly upon his lap. But, remembering who he was supposed to be, he held them up as though they were children of the gods and wept aloud and desperately. He perceived that he had betrayed himself by his agitation, and suddenly sat the children down, saying to Kesini: "O damsel, these twins are very much like my own children. When I

beheld them so unexpectedly I thought they were my own. And if thou comest to me so frequently people may think evil, for we are guests from another land."

Kesini therefore led the children away and went back to Damayanti to tell her all that had happened. Now the princess was as certain as ever she could be, through signs and indications reported by others, and was eager to see Vahuka herself. She therefore despatched Kesini to her mother, the queen, saying: "Go thou to the queen, Kesini, and tell her that I believe the charioteer Vahuka is in reality lost Nala, for I have tried him in several ways. Say that my only doubt now relates to his appearance, and so I must examine him myself. Beg the queen either to let him enter the palace or give me permission to go to him. She may consult my father or not, just as she thinks fit."

When the queen heard the message from Kesini's lips she went immediately into king Bhima's apartment and told him what his daughter intended to do, and he, when he understood all, quickly gave his consent.

The next morning, then, a messenger came up to

Vahuka with the king's orders that he should attend at the palace. The charioteer was surprised and concerned by this command, but obeyed mutely, and was led by the herald through the maze of lofty corridors and cool halls towards the apartments of the princess.

Damayanti, awaiting him, was arrayed like one overwhelmed with grief, being clad in a piece of red cloth, her hair matted and her fair skin sprinkled with dust and dirt. The charioteer was ushered into the chamber, and, being confronted suddenly with the piteous sight of Damayanti, was smitten with a paroxysm of sorrow. And the princess could not hide her anguish on beholding the sorry aspect of king Nala. Her voice trembled as she addressed him:

"O Vahuka, hast thou ever known of a duty-loving person who has deserted his sleeping wife in the heart of a vast forest? Who would expect that virtuous Nala could go away, abandoning his defenceless wife in the tangled woods, his dear and unoffending wife so weary and outworn? Was I from my earliest youth guilty of any offence in the eyes of Nala, that he should steal away thus into the darksome jungle while I was overcome

with sleep? Why should he, chosen before all the high gods, abandon his devoted and ever-loving wife, who was the mother also of his children? Before the holy fire, in the presence of four celestials, he took my hand and vowed, 'I will be thine for ever.' Oh, where was that vow when he left me?"

The tears begotten of her long sorrow began to flow pitifully from Damayanti's eyes, and Nala, beholding her distress, could not prevent his dark young eyes from shedding the hot tears of repentance.

"O timid one," he said, "not the loss of my kingdom nor my desertion of thee was my own act. It was the evil spirit of Kali which brought us misfortune and caused us to be separated. And since thou, O most virtuous of women, lamenting for me night and day when we were lost amidst the deep darkness of the wood, didst curse Kali, that evil one, dwelling within my body, began to burn under thy malediction, so that he lived within me like a fire within a fire. But now, my beloved, I have overcome that wretch by religious observances and fierce austerities, and our sorrows are all ended. The sinful Kali has left me, and so I have come hither;

for my presence here, O fair lady, is for thy sake. I have no other purpose. Oh, how canst thou forsake thy loving and devoted Nala to choose a second lord? Have not messengers ridden to the four corners of the earth proclaiming, 'Bhima's daughter will choose a second husband'? And so without loss of time the mighty Rituparna hath arrived."

The bitter sorrow in his voice made Damayanti tremble, and the reproach frightened her. Wringing her hands despairingly she hastened to explain: "Thou must not think evil of me, my beloved. O monarch of Nishada, I chose thee as my lord rather than any of the gods. For fortunate are they who ever beheld such a righteous lord as thou art. To bring thee hither I sent out Brahmans in all directions, to all the four quarters of the earth, who sang my message in the form of ballads. At last one of them, named Parnada, found thee at Kosala in the service of king Rituparna, and brought back to me the answer that only thou couldst have made. Then it was that I thought of this plan to recover thee. For there is no one in the world, O king, but thou, who can drive a team of horses for a thousand

*yojanas* in a single day. I can swear truly, touching thy feet, that I have not even in thought committed any sin. Let the all-seeing Air that courseth through this world take my life from me, if I have committed any sin. May the sun that for ever courseth through the sky take my life, if I have committed any sin. May the moon that every creature knoweth as a silent witness take my life, if I have committed any sin. O ye three gods that sustain the three worlds in their complexity, declare now the truth, or forsake me to-day and for ever!"

Thus invoked by Damayanti, the Wind-God spoke from the sky and said:

"O Nala, I answer thee, she hath done no wrong! But guarding faithfully the honour of thy family, O king, the princess Damayanti hath enhanced it. We gods are the witnesses of this, since we have protected and guarded her for the past three years. It was for thy sake she devised this ingenious plan, knowing fully well that only thou couldst travel a thousand *yojanas* in one day. Thus hast thou found Bhima's daughter again, and she once more shall be proclaimed thy queen. Do not harbour any suspicions, but be united in happiness, ye who are

equally matched in virtue, whose goodness maketh the earth tremble and the throne of Indra rock."

When the voice of the Wind-God was heard no more a gentle shower of floral petals began to fall upon the astonished pair, and the celestial kettle-drum commenced to beat, while soft breezes, musical and auspicious, filled the air. King Nala, beholding all these wonders, felt every doubt concerning Damayanti vanish like snow before the sun, until she was as spotless as a sea of milk. He wished to embrace his beloved, but remembered just in time that his form was still that of Vahuka, the misshapen charioteer. Then he bethought himself of the piece of celestial cloth which Karkotaka, the king of serpents, had given him when he had changed him into that ugly guise. He wrapped it around his waist and was immediately transformed into his former self. The dwarf Vahuka became the tall and shapely Nala, and the queen, seeing the faultless limbs and flashing eyes of her heroic husband, wept for joy, embracing him long and tenderly.

She nestled her beautiful head upon his breast, sighing deeply as though it was painful to experience such bliss; and, remembering all the sorrows they had passed through,

her wondrous eyes brimmed with tears, the lustrous tears of joy. Nala stood silent, clasping his dust-covered, grief-stained Damayanti to him, fiercely, yet compassionately, as though he would never know the warmth of her sweet body again. And in his heart he vowed that never a day would pass but love would grow stronger, even more endearing. So they remained together locked in each other's arms for a long while, sighing and smiling to each other, saying nothing but what their caressing arms made eloquent.

The queen-mother, who had been waiting in an antechamber hidden from view by a heavy curtain, having seen all that had passed between her daughter and Nala, hastened to king Bhima to tell him the joyful tidings. With gladness in his heart the old king said: "Let Nala pass this day in peace with Damayanti by his side; to-morrow, after his bathing and sacrificing, I will see him."

The happy lovers passed that night pleasantly, recalling to each other the many vicissitudes of their life in the wild forest. All the terror and anguish of the days in the jungle was forgotten. "The clusters of flowers

waving in the wind were thy beautiful chowries, my beloved, the broad-shaded trees were thy umbrellas, leaves thy bed, rocks thy throne, bees thy singing-women, and the fruits of the forest served to keep us alive." Everything was forgotten, save the happiness of being reunited. From that moment they began to build their future anew, passing the days blissfully in the palace of king Bhima.

Thus was Nala restored to his wife four years after the loss of his kingdom, and began to experience once more the full joy of living; while Damayanti, who for so long had been pale and withered under the storms of misfortune, rejoicing exceedingly in the recovery of her lord, regained all her freshness, even as do tender plants by a shower of rain. Thus she illuminated the earth with the beauty of the lotus that seemed to cling to her. Her weariness gone, her anxieties removed, she shone forth even as a night made brilliant by the bright disc of the moon.

The next morning Nala bathed in the rock-hewn pools of the shady gardens, and performed sacrifices to Agni and Varuna with many prayers. Then, having

robed himself in rich cloth and put on numerous ornaments fitting his rank, he led forth his smiling wife into the presence of king Bhima. In the great colonnaded council-hall the full concourse of warriors and ſtatesmen awaited him. Nala advanced and saluted his father-in-law with becoming humility, then the fair Damayanti paid her filial reſpects. King Bhima rose from his rich divan, received him with great joy, calling him son, giving him due honour along with his devoted wife, and finally blessed them in generous words. Then he called upon Indra to give them prosperity throughout the whole of their sojourn on earth. King Nala, as became him, returned homage and offered the king his services. When the citizens heard that king Nala had returned safe and sound there was wild enthusiasm and a great uproar of delight arose. They decorated the towers and walls and turrets with flags and flying ſtandards and garlands of fresh blossoms. The ſtreets were watered, then ſtrewn with floral petals, and feſtooned with vivid wreaths and ribbons. At their gates the citizens piled masses of flowers for the great occasion, and in the temples and upon shrines set marvellous sprigs of blooms.

Within the palace, meanwhile, the ritual of Nala's rehabilitation was drawing to a close. An interested but amazed spectator of it all was Rituparna, the wise king of Kosala, for he had been told that his own charioteer was united to Damayanti, but had not expected to find Vahuka to be none other than famous Nala. As a guest he stood behind king Bhima, and at the close of the ceremony, approaching Nala, gave him his blessing with gladness and cordiality, humbly asking his forgiveness for any indignities he might have caused him to suffer. With a countenance expressive of the utmost wonder he said: "By what good fortune hast thou regained the company of thy wife and thus obtained celestial joy? O Nishada, whilst thou wast dwelling in disguise in my house I trust I did not wrong thee in any way; though my brows may have sometimes curved in anger, there was no crookedness in my heart. Lord of earth, if wittingly or unwittingly I have done thee any wrong, I beseech thee to forgive me." He then pronounced a blessing: "May the Goddess of Fortune be thy constant companion, may she shower wealth on thee, as a cloud showers water, and may thy armies roam over

the earth, like the rays of the sun, shedding into every corner the light of order."

Nala replied: "Thou hast never done me the slightest wrong, O monarch, and if thou hadst it would not anger me, for surely I would forgive thee. Wast thou not my friend, and art thou not related to me? Henceforth thou shalt be a greater delight to me than ever. I lived happily in thy abode, as happy as in my own palace. Let me not forget that I have yet to initiate thee into the lore of horses which I promised thee, and is still in my keeping. If thou wishest, O king, I will make it over to thee."

Rituparna agreed, and thereupon received, with all the ordained rites, the science and mysteries of horses. That same day the royal son of Bhangasura bade farewell to Nala and his queen and her father Bhima, setting out for his own city of Ayodhya. He rode slowly through the forest in the moonlight towards his kingdom.

## CHAPTER X

FOR a whole month king Nala tarried in the rose-coloured city of Kundina, enjoying the honour afforded him, enjoying also the many entertainments and the regenerate beauty of fair Damayanti, who was like a newly opened lotus-bloom. Presently the preparations for his departure were complete, and the day arrived for him to set out for his own kingdom of Nishada. In the great courtyard of the palace the cavalcade was assembling; the newly painted car of shimmering white was there and Varshneya—who was, to his supreme joy, returning with his lord—was directing the harnessing of the team of lithe horses. There were sixteen elephants caparisoned in purple and gold, laden with costly presents and the provisions for the journey, fifty picked warriors from the cavalry and six hundred spearmen to act as escort.

At last the formation was ready. The mists of early

evening were rising, and one felt the cool freshness after the fierce heat of the day. Trumpeters stationed upon the ramparts of the palace blared forth the signal for the street to be cleared that led to the western gate. Through the tall central archway of the palace Nala appeared, leading his radiant lady, and with them came king Bhima and his gentle queen, followed by two of Damayanti's warrior brothers.

They stood for a while upon the terrace taking tender leave of each other and bidding affectionate farewells, for Damayanti was to remain in Kundina until Nala had recovered his kingdom. Bhima blessed the departing monarch, calling upon Manibhadra to watch over him and make his journey safe. After that the heroic king descended from the terrace and mounted the gleaming white chariot, while heralds galloped towards the city gate with the news that the procession was about to start. To the beat of drums and shattering fanfares of a thousand trumpets, preceded by a score of men playing upon pipes and cymbals, the cavalcade wound out of the palace courtyard towards the gate of the west. The dense crowds of the populace that lined the way cheered

loudly as the procession passed and showered blessings upon the smiling king, who repeatedly acknowledged them with graceful gestures of the hands.

The great gates were thrown open, and as they passed through the watch of the evening saluted them from the turrets towering upon each side. They took the winding road across the plain, and when they had gone about one-quarter of a *yojana*, Nala looked back upon the rosy pinnacles and high crenelles, upon the carven pyramids of the temples, and the huge terraced edifice of Bhima's palace. His face was somewhat wistful, for he thought to himself: "Those who find the night pass as quickly as a moment in the society of the beloved, find, when separated, the cold-rayed moon as scorching as a meteor," and he knew that months would pass before he would hold his loved one in his arms.

The journey was quite uneventful, so that in due course, at a leisurely pace, they arrived within sight of the capital of Nishada. Nala halted his company and ordered a camp to be set up in that place which, although in sight of his native city, was yet some distance from it. He explained to Varshneya that he must go forward

himself to parley with his brother, and that he therefore must stay in the camp until his return, or until a messenger bearing his sword should come with orders to lead them into the city. When he had arranged all this, Nala mounted the white car alone and drove at a tremendous speed towards the walls of Nishada. The captain of the guard received him with astonishment and, not knowing what else to do, let him pass. In like manner Nala went on to the palace yard, and, leaving his chariot there, strode without hesitation straight into the banqueting-hall, where he guessed he would most likely find his dissolute brother. Pushkara was reclining upon a couch, a golden goblet lifted to his lips, gazing intently upon the dancing of a young *bayadère*. There was a shout of amazement when Nala, thrusting aside the coloured curtains over the archway, walked calmly down the vaulted hall. He stood for a while contemplating the frightened Pushkara, then slowly and deliberately said:

"Let us play at dice again, for now I have vast wealth. Damayanti and everything I possess shall be my stake, O Pushkara; let thy kingdom be thine. Come, let us

begin! I am determined on it. Faith, let us stake all we have, even our lives! It is ordained that if one wins another's wealth or kingdom it is his duty to stake it all again, if the just owner so demands. But of course, if thou hast no taste for dice, let the game be with weapons. By single combat let one of us find peace. Therefore choose, O Pushkara, the dice or the keen steel in combat."

Having recovered his composure, Pushkara, so sure of his success at gambling, laughed contemptuously, and replied in a sneering tone: "How lucky it is, O Nala, that thou hast now vast wealth to stake. It is indeed fortunate that Damayanti's ill-luck at last hath ceased to pursue thee. And, O my brother of mighty arms, it is even greater good-fortune that both thyself and thy wife are still alive. When I have won Damayanti with all this wealth thou speakest of, why, she will be able to wait upon me as an Apsaras in heaven waits upon Indra. I have been thinking of thee every day and waiting for thy return, for gambling hath no charms for me unless it be with my kinsman. Therefore to-day I shall regard myself as the most fortunate of men, for I shall win the

fair Damayanti, whose faultless features have always been enshrined within my heart."

Nala raged inwardly at these insolent words, his immediate desire being to smite off the braggart's head with his sword. Smiling, however, although his eyes blazed with anger, Nala said: "Surely when thou hast beaten me is the time to say all that. Come, let us play!"

So dice were brought, and the rivals prepared for the game. Nala staked upon the first throw all that he had, his life as well as Damayanti's, and Pushkara did likewise, his life and the kingdom. Then the king threw, and a mighty shout went up when it was seen that Nala had won. Pushkara cowered back, pale and aghast; he was too amazed to utter one word. Triumphant and smiling king Nala turned to his brother and said: "Now the kingdom indubitably is mine, and thou, most wicked of kings, shalt never look upon the princess of Vidarbha! Thou art not fit to be her slave, whose beauty is like wine within a wondrous bowl. True, a common stone may break a golden cup, but the treasure is still mine. Didst thou not know that my former defeat at thy hands

was not due to any skill of thine? Didst thou not know, poor fool, that Kali did it all? And because of that I shall not impute to thee the faults of others. I grant thee thy life; live as thou choosest. Thou shalt also receive thy portion of all due necessities. For, O my brother, my affection for thee is just the same; and rather would I bind one free man with chains of love than set a thousand captives free. O Pushkara, my brother, live thou for a thousand years."

Thus Nala forgave his brother and gave him permission to return to his own estates. Pushkara, comforted by this, saluted the rightful king, addressing him with folded hands: "Let thy fame be immortal, and mayest thou live happily for ten thousand years. Had but my deeds been like thy words, then should I have been numbered amongst holy men, O king, who granted me both life and refuge."

And he dwelt with Nala for a month, was entertained by him, and finally went away to his own palace, accompanied by his family and a large force of servants.

All the while the crest-jewel among men blazed forth in beauty like a second sun. Having settled the affairs

of Pushkara he entered into full possession of his gorgeous palace. At once he called together a general council of Brahmans and warriors and sent out proclamations to the citizens. From end to end of the country there was wild rejoicing. The officers of state in the name of the people waited upon the king and addressed him: "O king, there is gladness in the city and throughout the country, for we have obtained our beloved monarch, whose high birth may be a pearl of lustre, but whose glory has been to live by deeds."

Not long after this the city was decorated for great festivals that were to celebrate the arrival of the princess Damayanti from her father's home, whither Nala had gone to fetch her. When they were within sight of the city the princess said to Nala: "This splendid city of ours is more beauteous even than the world of the moon; it surpasseth in splendour the court of the gods." She came riding upon a stately elephant that was robed in cloth of gold and dyed plumes. Great was the enthusiasm of the citizens when they espied her seated within the carved *howdah* with her son and daughter, Indrasen and Indrasena, followed by her splendid retinue of warriors;

the steely gleams that flashed from the swords seemed like binding-ropes sent forth to steal those jewels which men call stars.

For many days the festivities went on. There were contests and ceremonies, costly sacrifices in the dark temples, and finally the feasts were brought to a close by the heroic splendour of the great horse-sacrifice. And when all was done the king began to spend his days in joy like the lord of the celestials in the garden of Nandana. And, thus having regained his kingdom and his beautiful Damayanti, king Nala became the most illustrious monarch of all India.

The city of Nishada grew; its temples rose more gorgeously towards the realms of the celestials; far-famed were its shrines, and a wondrous sight to behold; and the tidings spread that the Goddess of Prosperity had come to dwell in their city as in a lotus plant.

## NOTES

THE following notes, which are of the briefest, are intended for the reader who knows practically nothing of Sanskrit literature or mythology. The student or "curious" reader will obtain all the references and information he may require in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, 12 vols., Edinburgh, 1908–20.

p. 1. *NISHADA* — also known as Nalapura, sometimes contracted to Narwar. It was situated on the right bank of the river Sindh, forty miles south-west of Gwalior. The kingdom of Nishada practically corresponds to the modern Southern Malwa.

p. 1. *INDRA* — the great Vedic god of the Aryan warriors. He is the chief god of the atmosphere, and is closely connected with the thunder. He has many names, owing partly to his different attributes, and partly to his adopting the names of conquered foes. In post-Vedic

days he becomes connected with the Hindu paradise, *svarga*, and loses much of his ancient dignity and importance.

p. 1. *MANU* is the Hindu Adam and the founder of sacrificial rites. He was saved by a great fish during a universal flood, and afterwards begot the human race by Ida, who arose as his daughter from his sacrifices. Legends about him multiplied, and one of his descendants is the famous Manu who was the traditional author of the law-code of India.

p. 1. *VEDAS* are four in number, the oldest and most important being the *Rig-Veda*. It consists of a collection of hymns, and is the oldest extant literature in the world. The second is the *Sama Veda*, which is a repetition of part of the above arranged for ritual singing. Thirdly comes the *Yajur Veda*, which consists of hymns with special reference to sacrifices. The fourth Veda is known as the *Atharva*, but is on quite a different plane from the other three, which

are all closely connected. It deals almost exclusively with magic.

According to the most recent conclusions of scholars, the date of the earliest hymns of the *Rig-Veda* can be placed at about 1200 B.C.

p. 3. *VIDARBHA* — corresponds to Berar, the south-west district of the Central Provinces.

p. 3. *BRAHMARSHI* — See below under *Rishis*.

p. 4. *RISHIS* — are the inspired sages, to whom the divine knowledge of the Vedas was transmitted. Although originally Brahmans, later tradition includes members from the other castes. Thus the term *Brahmarshi*, a Brahman-Rishi, has arisen.

p. 4. *KAMA* — the god of love, and husband of Rati. He rides a parrot and carried a bow of sugar-cane, the bow-string of which is formed of a line of bees. His arrows are tipped with flowers.

p. 4. *NANDANA* — is Indra's pleasure-ground and the garden of the gods, surpassing

all human understanding in the degree of its beauty.

p. 5. *USHAS* — the Vedic goddess of the dawn. Her family history varies in the different accounts. She is sometimes represented as the wife of Surya, the sun-god; or as the mother of both Surya and Agni, the fire-god. In this case she is also the sister of the Ashvins.

p. 5. *ASHVINS* — These are twin deities of light. Whether they represent the morning and evening stars, day and night, or heaven and earth, it is impossible to say. They ride in a golden chariot and are the precursors of the dawn. For further details, and the myths connected with them, see my *Ocean of Story*, vol. iii, pp. 257, 258.

p. 5. *APSARASES* — were originally water-nymphs, of which Urvashi, mentioned in the Vedas, was the most famous. In the Epics they become the wives or mistresses of the Gandharvas. They are attached to Indra's court as singers, dancers and musicians. In this capacity they closely resemble the Mohammedan *houris*.

p. 6. *THE THREE WORLDS* — that of mortals, that of the gods above and that of the nether regions.

p. 9. *KAILASA* — the modern Kailas, is the highest peak of that portion of the Himalaya lying to the north of Lake Manasarowar. In post-Vedic times it became famous as the dwelling-place of Shiva and Parvati.

p. 11. *KANDARPA* — another name of Kama, the Hindu Cupid.

p. 12. *BRAHMA* — can, perhaps, best be described as the name given to the Supreme Soul, the impersonal, all-embracing divine essence, the source and final goal of all existence.

In post-Vedic days Brahma becomes one of the three hypostases of that omnipotent divinity whose creative activity he represents. The other two, Vishnu and Shiva, represent its preservative and destructive aspects respectively.

p. 14. *SVAYAMVARA* — marriage by choice, in which the woman places a garland round the neck of the chosen suitor. For details as to the possible origin of

the custom, see J. Przyluski, *Journal Asiatique*, 1924, pp. 101–137. The posthumous work of E. Cosquin, *Les Contes Indiens et l'Occident*, Paris, 1922, pp. 317–328, should also be consulted.

pp. 14, 89. *FIVE RIVERS* — which form the country known as *Panchanada*, or in Persian *Panjab*, which name has remained to this day. The five rivers in question are usually : Indus, Jelam, Chenab, Ravi, and Bias. Sometimes, however, the Sutlej is included in the place of Indus.

p. 16. *MAGHAVAN* — the epithet *par excellence* of Indra in the *Rig-Veda*. It is formed from *magha*, " bounty," and means " generous giver."

In post-Vedic days it survived as a proper name of Indra.

p. 16. *VALA AND VRITRA* — demons overcome by Indra. Both these demons figure in myths connected with Indra's office as chief god of the atmosphere. They had hidden the " Kine " (*i.e.* the waters of the monsoon, or possibly the sunlight) in a cave, and by conquering the demons

Indra released them for the benefit of mankind.

p. 17. *LOKAPALAS* are the guardians of the four cardinal and four intermediate points of the compass. They are usually as follows: Indra, guardian of the East; Agni, of the South-East; Varuna, of the West; Yama, of the South; Surya, of the South-West; Pavana or Vayu, of the North-West; Kuvera, of the North; Soma or Chandra, of the North-East.

p. 17. *AGNI* the god of Fire. His origin varies considerably in the different accounts. He is sometimes said to be the brother of Indra and Varuna. He is the spirit of the sacrificial fire, and in later art is represented as riding on a ram.

p. 17. *GANDHARVAS* the generative powers of nature. In later times they appear as heavenly minstrels, lovers of the Apsarases. They are gorgeously clad and carry shining arms. They often come to earth and are most attractive to woman. They are also the tutelary deities of marriage.

p. 18. *YAMA* — god of the underworld. He is the first man that died. He has two dogs which act as his messengers, and meet the spirits on their way to the gloomy world.

In post-Vedic times he becomes a judge of the dead, representing closely the Pluto of Greek mythology. His "vehicle" is a dark buffalo.

p. 18. *VARUNA* — In Vedic times he is the great deity of the universe, of nature and morality, and is usually coupled with Mitra, who is representative of the power of the sun.

In post-Vedic times he becomes the Hindu Neptune.

p. 21. *NAGAS AND PATALA* — do not really attain full recognition till the period of the Epics. They figure largely in the *Mahabharata*. Usually they are snakes with human heads, but occasionally they are human as far as the waist. They dwell in Patala, the underworld, in a city called Bhogavati.

p. 21. *GARUDA* — the king of birds and a bitter enemy of the Nagas (serpents).

He has a human body with the wings and head of a kite. Garuda is a sun-god and his eating of the Nagas is symbolical of the dawn.

p. 34. *MAHOUTS* — elephant-drivers. A word derived from the Sanskrit *mahā-mātra*, "great in measure," *i.e.* "a high officer."

p. 38. *BHOGAVATI* — See under *Nagas*.

p. 38. *UMBRELLAS* — the emblem of royalty throughout the East since the dawn of history. They were not known in Europe till the time of Marco Polo (1292), and were uncommon in England as late as the middle of the eighteenth century. I have elsewhere (*The Ocean of Story*, vol. ii, p. 263 *et seq.*) discussed the subject in full, giving numerous references from all parts of the world.

p. 40. *ZAITUNI SATIN* — *i.e.* satin from Zaitún, or Ts'wan-chau. Ibn Batuta, the greatest of Arabian travellers, in describing the city, says: "It is a great city, superb indeed, and in it they make damasks of velvet as well as those of satin, which are called

from the name of the city Zaituníah. . . ." In a note on the passage (*Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. iv, p. 118) Sir Henry Yule shows that the word is very probably the origin of our "satin."

p. 43. *FOR THE SAKE OF THAT TRUTH*

In Hindu fiction the declaration of a simple fact, accompanied by a desire for a certain thing to happen in proof of the declaration being true, is known by the name of *sachchakiriya*, "act of truth." *Cf.* 2 Kings i. 10–12. The power of absolute truth is omnipotent, and as such has found a ready acceptance in the hands of the story-teller. The *motif* has been ably discussed by E. W. Burlingame, *Journ. Roy. As. Soc.*, July 1917, p. 429 *et seq.* I have also dealt with the subject in *The Ocean of Story*, vol. i, p. 166; vol. ii, pp. 31–33; and vol. iii, pp. 179–182.

p. 45. *SHACHI*

or Indrani, the wife of Indra.

p. 46. *SOMA*

is here the drink derived from the sacred soma-plant, said to have been given to Indra, with

whom it became a great favourite. According to the Vedic hymns, Soma is a kind of Hindu Bacchus. In later days he becomes the moon-god. The intricate rites connected with the preparation of soma-juice and the important soma sacrifice cannot be given here. As to what plant soma actually was, we know nothing for certain. The latest suggestions will be found in the *Journ. Roy. As. Soc.*, July 1920, pp. 349–351, and April 1921, pp. 241–244.

p. 46. *BAYADÈRES* — the dancing-girl of South India. The word is merely a French form of the Portuguese *bailadeira*, from *bailar*, "to dance."

See the paper by J. Shortt, *Memoirs read before the Anthropological Soc.*, London, vol. iii, 1870, pp. 182–194, and my Appendix on Sacred Prostitution, *The Ocean of Story*, vol. i, pp. 231–280.

p. 47. *DVAPARA AND KALI* — are demons of gambling. Dvapara is the side marked with two points, and Kali that marked with only one point. They are better known simply as the third

and fourth Yugas or Ages of the World, and correspond roughly to the Brass and Iron Ages of the classics. For a full description see H. Jacobi, Hastings' *Ency. Rel. Eth.*, vol. i, p. 200 *et seq.*

p. 52. *THE "BULL"* — or *vrisha* dice. In Somadeva's version of *Nala and Damayanti*, the word is taken literally and they play for a white bull as a stake. See *The Ocean of Story*, vol. iv, p. 241, and *cf.* p. 276 of the same volume.

p. 55. *VETALAS* — can perhaps best be described as mischievous demons, who abide chiefly in cemeteries and burning-grounds. They especially delight in tenanting dead bodies and frightening the unwary person who chances to stray in the gloomy precincts of a *ghat*.

p. 59. *AYODHYA* — the capital of Kosala, the modern Oudh. Ayodhya lay near the modern Faizabad.

p. 59. *CHOWRIES* — are the fly-whisks made from the tails of the Tibetan yak. The chowrie has been an emblem of royalty in Asia from time im-

memorial. With the umbrella, it forms part of the regalia. It was also used like a plume in horse-trappings.

p. 63. *AVANTI* — is the ancient name of Malwa, or the kingdom of Ujjain.

p. 63. *RIKSHAVAT* — the eastern part of the great Vindhya range.

p. 68. *ADITYAS* — a group of Vedic gods, the chief of which are Indra, Surya, Varuna, Mitra, Daksha, and Bhaga.

p. 68. *VASUS* — a group of gods in close association with Agni.

p. 68. *MARUTS* — Vedic gods connected with Rudra. They carry axes or spears, and are associated with thunder, lightning, and rain.

p. 74. *KUSHA GRASS* — a peculiarly sacred kind of *darbha* grass. It enters into all the most important Hindu ceremonies. The origin of *darbha* grass is explained in numerous legends. It is sharp and pointed, and one tradition tells how it was formed from Vishnu's hairs which came off when he was acting as a pivot for Mount Mandara at the Churning of the Ocean, in his tortoise incarnation.

p. 74. *CHEETUL* — or chital is a handsome spotted deer (*Cervus axis*). It has a fawn-red coat and white spots.

p. 74. *SAMBHUR* — the largest and handsomest of Indian deer, usually known as the sambar (*Cervus* [*Rusu*] *unicolor*). It has massive and rugged antlers.

p. 76. *RAKSHASAS* — are the most prominent of demons. They delight in disturbing sacrifices, worrying devotees, animating dead bodies, and, in fact, thoroughly living up to their name, which means " the harmers " or " destroyers."

p. 78. *SHAMI* — is a broad-leaved tree mentioned in the Atharva-Veda and many later works. It is said to produce intoxication.

p. 79. *AMRITA* — is the nectar of the Hindu gods. It imparts immortal life to those who drink it. During the Deluge it was lost, but was recovered at the famous Churning of the Ocean, described in the *Ramayana* and *Vishnu-purana*. See Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 330, 498.

p. 84. *MAYA* — in Rig-Veda days meant "cunning," "magic rites," and so forth. It was later that it began to assume the meaning of "cosmic illusion," and formed such an important tenet in the great Vedanta philosophy. See further *The Ocean of Story*, vol. vi, pp. 34, 35.

p. 84. *ASHOKA TREE* — (*Jonesia asoca*). This is perhaps one of the most beautiful trees, when in full bloom, in the whole vegetable kingdom. Its flowers are red and orange, and its leaves are abruptly pinnate and shining. The tree is regarded as a symbol of love, and is also believed to have a certain charm in preserving chastity. The flowers, owing to their colour and delicate perfume, are used largely for temple decoration.

p. 86. *YAKSHA* — is the name of certain beings subject to Kuvera, the God of Wealth. They possess magical powers, and are guardians of treasures.

p. 86. *MANIBHADRA* — a king of Yakshas and guardian of caravans.

p. 87. *CHEDI* — was the region round Bilaspur and Jabalpur.

p. 92. *RAKSHASI* — is the feminine form of Rakshasa, for which see above.

p. 92. *PISHACHI* — the feminine of Pishacha, which is a demon closely resembling the Rakshasas. They are "eaters of raw flesh" and appear in the Epics as ghouls.

p. 93. *SHRI* — or Lakshmi, is the consort of Vishnu.

p. 113. *RATI* — See under Kama.

p. 113. *RAHU* — was an enemy of the gods who, at the Churning of the Ocean, stole some of the *amrita* (*q.v.*). He was discovered, and his head cut off by the discus of Vishnu. Thus, only his head, in which was the *amrita*, became immortal, and came to represent the ascending nodes of the moon's orbit. Rahu naturally bore a grudge against the sun and the moon, and whenever he gets an opportunity, tries to swallow them. His shadow is thus thrown on

the intended victim and produces what, in our ignorance, we call an eclipse!

p. 118. *DASARNA* — a part of the Chattisgarh district, in the Central Provinces.

p. 121. *VINA* — is the most intricate of all Indian musical instruments. It consists of a long narrow finger-board, near each end of which protrudes a large gourd. It is played seated with folded legs, one gourd resting on the left shoulder, while the other is supported on the folded legs. The wires are struck with *mizrabs* (a small wire plectrum in the shape of a finger-nail) and with nails kept long for the purpose. The left-hand fingers are pressed on the fixed frets, producing the different notes.

A more detailed description of the *vina* and the *tambura* will be found in Fyzee-Rahamin's *Music of India*, 1925, p. 53 *et seq.*

p. 121. *TAMBURA* — is said to have been invented by the Rishi Narada, who figures in *Nala and Damayanti*. It consists of a sloping gourd and a long

neck. It is strung by four wires only, and is used to accompany songs and other instruments. It is played seated. The gourd is placed between the legs and the neck rests on the right shoulder. The cords are struck with the first finger of the right hand at regular intervals.

p. 121. *UDUMBARA-WOOD* *ficus glomerata*, a sacred wood which entered into many of the chief Vedic ceremonies.

p. 123. *NARD* better known to us through the *Song of Songs* as Spikenard. The origin of the word is uncertain, and has a complicated history throughout the East. See W. H. Schoff, *Journ. Amer. Orient. Soc.*, vol. xliii, pp. 216–228.

p. 126. *YOJANA* is variously given as equal to two and a half, nine, and eighteen miles. In certain passages in this work Oriental exaggeration has been given full play, thus we must show no surprise at a chariot covering a thousand *yojanas*.

p. 144. *SHASTRAS* are the six "bodies of teaching," or systems of philosophy, which

grew out of the Upanishads, which, in their turn, form the third divisions of the Veda.

p. 155. *ICHOR-STREAMING* This refers to the *mada*, a dark oily matter which exudes from the temporal pores of the elephant when in a *musi* state. For further information see *The Ocean of Story*, vol. vi, p. 66, n.[1] *et seq.*

p. 185. *HORSE-SACRIFICE* This is the *ashvamedha*, one of the most ancient and important sacrifices in the whole of Indian ritual. It was a rite by which a victorious king rectified his claim to suzerainty over all neighbouring kings. Its complete ritual took over a year to perform. For an account of the ceremony see *The Ocean of Story*, vol. iv, pp. 13–16.

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